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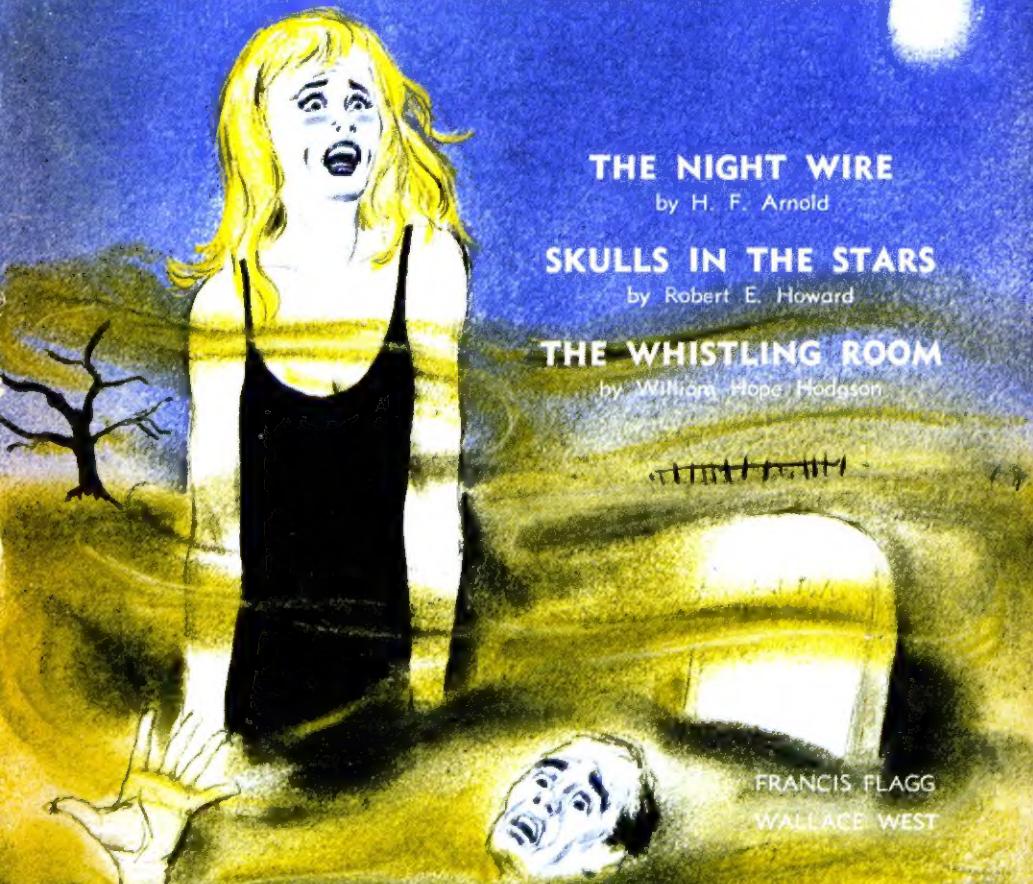
JUNE

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MAGAZINE OF

Horror

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



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by H. F. Arnold

SKULLS IN THE STARS

by Robert E. Howard

THE WHISTLING ROOM

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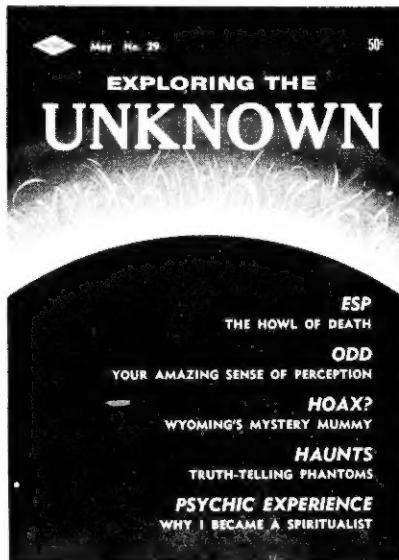
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magazine of

HORROR

Strange Tales and Science Fiction

Volume 2

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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Introduction

THERE ARE TIMES when a question can be more meaningful than an answer. Some years ago, during a policy discussion with a publisher, the question was put to us: "Are you a reader or an editor?" We've been pondering over the subtle differences ever since.

Yet, as Holmes would say, it's really quite elementary. When we ourselves read a magazine we are concerned only with our own preferences, likes, and dislikes. But when, as an editor, we read manuscripts, or consider what authors and stories to select for reprinting, we're bound to consider what our readers and potential readers prefer, so far as we can estimate it. Where there are any good clues, and these conflict with our own personal preferences, we must put ourselves to one side, as a reader, and as an editor, cater to our readers. There is one exception, of course, as we have mentioned before; we should not select a story which we consider to be poor; for if our readers tend to disagree with our judgment that a story is good, why this is the sort of misfortune which any editor must face — but if the readers tend to abhor a story which we ourselves thought poor in the first place, then we've been idiotic. Better to risk misfortune than idiocy.

The majority, and a massive one it is, have approved of the policy with which we started **MAGAZINE OF HORROR**: some classical material, some worthy material from magazines now generally unavailable, and some new material, brought together with as good a balance and variety in each issue as possible at the time; and, taking the longer view, presenting as wide an over-all balance as possible.

So long as we can do so in each issue, we want to offer you a good example from the works of at least one classic author we have not presented formerly; we also want to present at least one author, favored in the 20's and 30's, whose name has not appeared on our contents page previously. And, if possible, we want to present in each issue at least one story which some reader has asked for.

You have helped us greatly with your lists of suggestions, and we particularly thank those of you who keep sending us

(Turn To Page 125)

The Night Wire

by H. F. Arnold

Short-short stories are always in need for most fiction magazines, as they are very handy to fill up a few pages when the jigsaw puzzle of the issue is put together. Farnsworth Wright once said, some years after the event, that he was delighted with *The Night Wire*, but never dreamed it would make such an impact on his readers as it did — if he had, he would have featured it on the cover of the issue, having the artist do a scene from it for the illustration. Despite the dated aspect of the setting (somehow, stories which presumably took place in the '20's seem more dated today than stories written in the 19th century), we think you will find that the impact is still there.

Our thanks to ALICE PRESTON, who was the first to ask for it.

"NEW YORK, September 30
CP FLASH

Ambassador Holliwell died here today. The end came suddenly as the ambassador was alone in his study. . . ."

There is something ungodly about thees night wire jobs. You sit up here on the top floor of a skyscraper and listen in to the whispers of a civilization. New York, London, Calcutta, Bombay, Singapore — they're your next-door neighbors after

the street lights go dim and the world has gone to sleep.

Along in the quiet hours between two and four, the receiving operators doze over their sounders and the news comes in. Fires and disasters and suicides. Murders, crowds, catastrophies. Sometimes an earthquake with a casualty list as long as your arm. The night wire man takes it down almost in his sleep, picking it off on his typewriter with one finger.

Once in a long time you prick up your ears and listen. You've heard of some one you knew in Singapore, Halifax or Paris, long ago. Maybe they've been promoted, but more probably they've been murdered or drowned. Perhaps they just decided to quit and took some bizarre way out. Made it interesting enough to get in the news.

But that doesn't happen often. Most of the time you sit and doze and tap, tap on your typewriter and wish you were home in bed.

Sometimes, though, queer things happen. One did the other night, and I haven't got over it yet. I wish I could.

You see, I handle the night manager's desk in a western seaport town; what the name is, doesn't matter.

There is, or rather was, only one night operator on my staff, a fellow named John Morgan, about forty years of age, I should say, and a sober, hard-working sort.

He was one of the best operators I ever knew, what is known as a "double" man. That means he could handle two instruments at once and type the stories on different typewriters at the same time. He was one of the three men I ever knew who could do it consistently, hour after hour, and never make a mistake.

Generally, we used only one

wire at night, but sometimes, when it was late and the news was coming fast, the Chicago and Denver stations would open a second wire, and then Morgan would do his stuff. He was a wizard, a mechanical automatic wizard which functioned marvelously but was without imagination.

On the night of the sixteenth he complained of feeling tired. It was the first and last time I had ever heard him say a word about himself, and I had known him for three years.

It was just three o'clock and we were running only one wire. I was nodding over reports at my desk and not paying much attention to him, when he spoke.

"Jim," he said, "does it feel close in here to you?"

"Why, no, John," I answered, "but I'll open a window if you like."

"Never mind," he said. "I reckon I'm just a little tired."

That was all that was said, and I went on working. Every ten minutes or so I would walk over and take a pile of copy that had stacked up neatly beside the typewriter as the messages were printed out in triplicate.

It must have been twenty minutes after he spoke that I noticed he had opened up the other wire and was using both typewriters. I thought it was a little unusual, as there was nothing very "hot" coming in.

On my next trip I picked up the copy from both machines and took it back to my desk to sort out the duplicates.

The first wire was running out the usual sort of stuff and I just looked over it hurriedly. Then I turned to the second pile of copy. I remembered it particularly because the story was from a town I had never heard of: "Xebico". Here is the dispatch. I saved a duplicate of it from our files:

"Xebico, Sept. 16 CP BULLETIN

"The heaviest mist in the history of the city settled over the town at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon. All traffic has stopped and the mist hangs like a pall over everything. Lights of ordinary intensity fail to pierce the fog, which is constantly growing heavier.

"Scientists here are unable to agree as to the cause, and the local weather bureau states that the like has never occurred before in the history of the city.

"At 7 p.m. last night municipal authorities . . .

(more)"

That was all there was. Nothing out of the ordinary at a bureau headquarters, but, as I say, I noticed the story because of the name of the town.

IT MUST HAVE been fifteen minutes later that I went over for another batch of copy. Morgan was slumped down in his

chair and had switched his green electric light shade so that the gleam missed his eyes and hit only the top of the two typewriters.

Only the usual stuff was in the righthand pile, but the left-hand batch carried another story from Xebico. All press dispatches come in "takes" meaning that parts of many different stories are strung along together, perhaps with but a few paragraphs of each coming through at a time. This second story was marked "add fog." Here is the copy:

"At 7 p.m. the fog had increased noticeably. All lights were now invisible and the town was shrouded in pitch darkness.

"As a peculiarity of the phenomenon, the fog is accompanied by a sickly odor, comparable to nothing yet experienced here."

Below that in customary press fashion was the hour, 3:27, and the initials of the operator, JM.

There was only one other story in the pile from the second wire. Here it is:

"2nd add Xebico Fog

"Accounts as to the origin of the mist differ greatly. Among the most unusual is that of the sexton of the local church, who groped his way to headquarters in a hysterical condition and declared that the fog originated in the village churchyard.

"It was first visible as a soft gray blanket clinging to the

earth above the graves,' he stated. Then it began to rise, higher and higher. A subterranean breeze seemed to blow it in billows, which split up and then joined together again.

"Fog phantoms, writhing in anguish, twisted the mist into queer forms and figures. And then, in the very thick midst of the mass, something moved.

"I turned and ran from the accursed spot. Behind me I heard screams coming from the houses bordering on the graveyard."

"Although the sexton's story is generally discredited, a party has left to investigate. Immediately after telling his story, the sexton collapsed and is now in a local hospital, unconscious."

Queer story, wasn't it. Not that we aren't used to it, for a lot of unusual stories come in over the wire. But for some reason or other, perhaps because it was so quiet that night, the report of the fog made a great impression on me.

It was almost with dread that I went over to the waiting piles of copy. Morgan did not move, and the only sound in the room was the tap-tap of the sounders. It was ominous, nerve-racking.

There was another story from Xebico in the pile of copy. I seized on it anxiously.

"New Lead Xebico Fog CP

"The rescue party which went out at 11 P.M. to investigate a

weird story of the origin of a fog which, since late yesterday, has shrouded the city in darkness has failed to return. Another and larger party has been dispatched.

"Meanwhile, the fog has, if possible, grown heavier. It seeps through the cracks in the doors and fills the atmosphere with a depressing odor of decay. It is oppressive, terrifying, bearing with it a subtle impression of things long dead.

"Residents of the city have left their homes and gathered in the local church, where the priests are holding services of prayer. The scene is beyond description. Grown folk and children are alike terrified and many are almost beside themselves with fear.

"Amid the wisps of vapor which partly veil the church auditorium, an old priest is praying for the welfare of his flock. They alternately wail and cross themselves.

"From the outskirts of the city may be heard cries of unknown voices. They echo through the fog in queer uncadenced minor keys. The sounds resemble nothing so much as wind whistling through a gigantic tunnel. But the night is calm and there is no wind. The second rescue party . . . (more)"

I AM A calm man and never in a dozen years spent with the wires, have been known to be-

come excited, but despite myself I rose from my chair and walked to the window.

Could I be mistaken, or far down in the canyons of the city beneath me did I see a faint trace of fog? Pshaw! It was all imagination.

In the pressroom the click of the sounders seemed to have raised the tempo of their tune. Morgan alone had not stirred from his chair. His head sunk between his shoulders, he tapped the dispatches out on the typewriters with one finger of each hand.

He looked asleep, but no; endlessly, efficiently, the two machines rattled off line after line, as relentlessly and effortlessly as death itself. There was something about the monotonous movement of the typewriter keys that fascinated me. I walked over and stood behind his chair, reading over his shoulder the type as it came into being, word by word.

Ah, here was another:

"Flash Xebico CP

"There will be no more bulletins from this office. The impossible has happened. No messages have come into this room for twenty minutes. We are cut off from the outside and even the streets below us.

"I will stay with the wire until the end.

"It is the end, indeed. Since 4 P.M. yesterday the fog has hung over the city. Following

reports from the sexton of the local church, two rescue parties were sent out to investigate conditions on the outskirts of the city. Neither party has ever returned nor was any word received from them. It is quite certain now that they will never return.

"From my instrument I can gaze down on the city beneath me. From the position of this room on the thirteenth floor, nearly the entire city can be seen. Now I can see only a thick blanket of blackness where customarily are lights and life.

"I fear greatly that the wailing cries heard constantly from the outskirts of the city are the death cries of the inhabitants. They are constantly increasing in volume and are approaching the center of the city.

"The fog yet hangs over everything. If possible, it is even heavier than before, but the conditions have changed. Instead of an opaque, impenetrable wall of odorous vapor, there now swirls and writhes a shapeless mass in contortions of almost human agony. Now and again the mass parts and I catch a brief glimpse of the streets below.

"People are running to and fro, screaming in despair. A vast bedlam of sound flies up to my window, and above all is the immense whistling of unseen and unfelt winds.

"The fog has again swept

over the city and the whistling is coming closer and closer.

"It is now directly beneath me.

"God! An instant ago the mist opened and I caught a glimpse of the streets below.

"The fog is not simply vapor — it lives! By the side of each moaning and weeping human is a companion figure, an aura of strange and vari-colored hues. How the shapes cling! Each to a living thing!

"The men and women are down. Flat on their faces. The fog figures caress them lovingly. They are kneeling beside them. They are — but I dare not tell it.

"The prone and writhing bodies have been stripped of their clothing. They are being consumed — piecemeal.

"A merciful wall of hot, steamy vapor has swept over the whole scene. I can see no more.

"Beneath me the wall of vapor is changing colors. It seems to be lighted by internal fires. No, it isn't. I have made a mistake. The colors are from above, reflections from the sky.

"Look up! Look up! The whole sky is in flames. Colors as yet unseen by man or demon. The flames are moving; they have started to intermix; the colors rearrange themselves. They are so brilliant that my eyes burn, yet they are a long way off.

"Now they have begun to swirl, to circle in and out, twisting in intricate designs and patterns. The lights are racing each with each, a kaleidoscope of unearthly brilliance.

"I have made a discovery. There is nothing harmful in the lights. They radiate force and friendliness, almost cheeriness. But by their very strength, they hurt.

"As I look, they are swinging closer and closer, a million miles at each jump. Millions of miles with the speed of light. Aye, it is light the quintessence of all light. Beneath it the fog melts into a jeweled mist radiant, rainbow-colored of a thousand varied spectra.

"I can see the streets. Why, they are filled with people! The lights are coming closer. They are all around me. I am enveloped. I . . ."

THE MESSAGE stopped abruptly. The wire to Xebico was dead. Beneath my eyes in the narrow circle of light from under the green lamp-shade, the black printing no longer spun itself, letter by letter, across the page.

The room seemed filled with a solemn quiet, a silence vaguely impressive, powerful.

I looked down at Morgan. His hands had dropped nervelessly at his sides, while his body had hunched over peculiarly. I turned the lamp-shade back,

throwing the light squarely in his face. His eyes were staring, fixed.

Filled with a sudden foreboding, I stepped beside him and called Chicago on the wire. After a second the sounder clicked its answer.

Why? But there was something wrong. Chicago was reporting that Wire Two had not been used throughout the evening.

"Morgan!" I shouted. "Morgan! Wake up, it isn't true.

Some one has been hoaxing us. Why . . ." In my eagerness I grasped him by the shoulder.

His body was quite cold. Morgan had been dead for hours. Could it be that his sensitized brain and automatic fingers had continued to record impressions even after the end?

I shall never know, for I shall never again handle the night shift. Search in a world atlas discloses no town of Xebico. Whatever it was that killed John Morgan will forever remain a mystery.

Following the announcement that H. P. Lovecraft's essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, would appear complete in a forthcoming Arkham House volume, your votes, heretofore showing a majority in favor, turned the other way; and it is now clear that most of you are no longer in favor of our reprinting this work. We bow to your wishes.

Many of you who wrote in to say "no" under the circumstances made the alternate suggestion that we reprint the Lovecraft-Derleth novel, *The Lurker at the Threshold*, instead. This little book was published by Arkham House in 1945 and has long been out of print; it has been many years since we have seen it listed at any price.

We should have to run the novel in two installments at the very least; but if enough of you want it, and if we are able to make arrangements, we will do our best to comply with your desires in the matter.

Sacrilege

by Wallace West

In our first issue, we presented Wallace West's *A Thing of Beauty*, which Farnsworth Wright of WEIRD TALES had rejected as being too horrible for his readers. Your reception of this story indicated that the earlier rejection had been an error. West first appeared in that same magazine for its October 1927 issue, and for a time his stories were appearing under the names of Wallace G. West, or W. G. West; the "G" was quietly dropped later on. Closely associated with the Oil Industry, West writes much scientific material and has done notable work in attempting to draw the attention of both industry and the public to the problem and dangers of air and water pollution. Weird and science fiction has been a chronic sideline with him; four of his science fiction novels have been published by Avalon Books, and another by Gnome Press. (His most famous short story, *The Phantom Dictator*, for which some of you have asked, was incorporated into his latest Avalon novel, *The Time-Lockers*.) The present story was accepted by Mr. Wright, but was among a number of stories vetoed by his successors, who took over the magazine before this tale could be published.

Sacrilege: one that steals that which is sacred. — Webster's Unabridged

"MY BODY was every whit as good as that one yonder." Jeremiah pointed to a swimmer

outside our window. "A fine white body I had, suitable for many pleasures."

"So had we all." I shifted to a less uncomfortable seat on my chilly rock. "Don't excite yourself."

"Don't bait me." He drew breath between clenched teeth.

"The only carcass you'll inhabit will be that of a pig or a snake."

"Not if I steal a better one." He made a sound like laughter.

"But that means . . ." A greater chill touched me.

"I care not a fig. I'm damned unless I repent, and repent I will not. Not Jeremiah Mather, the witchburner, though we only hanged them in Salem."

* * * *

LET ME explain: I am dead. Mather was dead, although not dead enough yet. Back in 1930 I had been second-trick telegrapher at the Peeksford, Mass., railway station. One night Jim Breeden, the third-trick operator, and I got involved with bootleg liquor and dark doings. Jim had a perverted interest in things psychic which found expression in the exposure of phony mediums. That frigid night we had a few drinks, used sleight-of-hand tricks to break up a seance run by a charlatan, and, feeling quite superior to the local yokels, had more than a few more drinks before I went to work.

I was asleep beside my key when the dispatcher tapped an

order to stop #7 at Peeksford and let a belated New York express have right of way.

When the detested telephone awakened me, and the dispatcher cursed me into realization of what was happening, #7 had roared past the siding while around the bend the headlight of the Express was showing.

I ran out on the tracks, waving a red lantern. Brakes screamed. Whistles howled. I tried to leap aside. My shoe caught in a switch frog. Locomotives loomed. Reared. Tilted. Pain . . .

I picked myself up and searched for the lost lantern. I was in the center of chaos. Freight cars lay scattered up the track. People were running about. Steam squirted from overturned engines. Beside me lay Hank Gordon, #7's engineer. He was scalded and screaming — or trying to, for I heard no sound.

I met Peeksford's police chief and offered my assistance. He didn't hear me. I caught his arm, but it slipped through my grasp like a column of smoke. I shouted. He walked away.

In the glare of burning coaches I saw Jim Breeden and gripped his wide shoulders. He looked straight through me. Then I realized that I must be dead.

Sobs, the first sound other than my own voice that I had heard, made me turn. I saw Engineer Gordon kneeling beside his mangled body.

"Frank," he said. "There's

something wrong. I can't wake myself up!"

"Take it easy," I said. "You've just been killed. We're dead."

"Who will take care of Martha and the kids?" was the first thing he said. Then: "I saw your lantern. What caused the wreck?"

"I went to sleep on duty."

He looked at me with horror and turned away.

"Where are you going, Hank?"

"Over there. Don't you see the path?"

Fearing that he still was dazed, I tried to follow. I could not! When I walked in his direction we moved farther apart until he disappeared.

I turned back to the wreck, wondering where my own body lay. Because of my warning, #7 had slowed enough to lessen the shock. Several cars were derailed. Ambulances were carrying away injured passengers and trainmen, but Gordon was the only person killed besides me. He had stuck to his throttle too long while sanding the rails.

* * * *

SINCE THAT awful night I have wandered in what I suppose is purgatory. My land is a dim, windswept plain with little correspondence to the mountainous region around Peeksford. Sometimes the level of this astral sphere is high above that of the Massachusetts terrain —

which makes walking difficult, I can assure you. Sometimes it is far below and pitch dark. In a few places the planes coincide. One is at the railway station; another is at the village of Harristown, ten miles north. A third is at the edge of a lake behind John Horton's estate.

For a week I thought myself alone. I attended my funeral . . . they found my body under the Express locomotive . . . and got a detached pleasure from the ceremony when Jim, the only mourner, broke down and cried. Then I haunted the apartment we had shared until hunger forced me to look for food.

I was amazed at this and feared I might die a second time, for there were no trees and no game in my new home. Even had there been animals I could not have caught them, being naked and having no weapons.

I discovered, however, that edible moss covered the rocks, while snails and such-like were abundant. While foraging, I happened upon a cadaverous fellow creeping on hands and knees, also intent on filling his stomach. He introduced himself as Jeremiah, half-brother to the notorious Cotton Mather of Salem Town.

On closer acquaintance he boasted that he had been earth-bound for three centuries and forced to wander among scenes where the Mather family fanaticism had caused the hanging of

19 innocent victims and the pressing to death of another. He explained my presence by saying that I was responsible for Engineer Gordon's death *and* my own.

"But where is Cotton, who was responsible for those witchcraft trials?" I demanded.

"Oh, he repented after a century and won a reprieve. My miserable half-brother by father's first marriage thought he did right, you know. He believed he was stamping out remnants of paganism — or rather, I think that he *thought* he thought that, if you follow me. Actually, he enjoyed watching hanged witches kick as much as I did, though I liked burning them better, back in England. Fool!"

I wondered, briefly, which of many fools he referred to.

Unlike Cotton, Jeremiah gloated over his misdeeds and never tired of telling how he had trapped some poor, half-witted woman into a confession that she soured milk, consorted with the Devil, or put the evil eye on a neighbor.

His tales, related in quaint Elizabethan English, had a sinister fascination. Day after day, we would sit at our window, as we called it, beside the lake on the Horton estate while he related experiences that held me spellbound.

This window reached somewhat below the level of the lake,

so that we looked over the water as though viewing a scene through the wall of a case in an aquarium. Thus, when we sat, our heads were below the surface and we could see fish and lake plants. Yet, we were not submerged. When we advanced, the "glass" through which we looked at this scene retreated. We could not break through the barrier.

We chose this location because the sun penetrated more deeply there, lifting the chill somewhat. It also allowed us to watch and speculate upon the many comings and goings at the white-columned mansion.

ONE DAY WE were seated on our customary rock when two youngsters ran down to the lake in their bathing suits. The girl was Mary Horton, heiress to a fortune piled up by her broker father. I had seen her many times when she took the train at Peeksford and admired her hopelessly. She was tall, fair, with laughing blue eyes, a kissable mouth and a broad forehead.

The youth was Tom Bradley, a frequent visitor at the Horton place. As they splashed about near shore Jeremiah was moved to fury.

"If I had a body," he kept whispering. "If I could live again. Curse them, Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies!"

As he spoke, Mary struck out

toward a float anchored near the middle of the lake. For a few minutes she swam strongly. Then I saw that she had misjudged her ability; she was in serious trouble.

Jeremiah started running toward her, and I followed.

The girl struggled gamely but with a hundred yards still to go, doubled up with a cramp. Bradley then realized her danger and swam frantically to her assistance.

He was too late. Before he had covered half the distance, Mary went under. Still struggling feebly, she sank through the green depths and came to rest on the bottom where it coincided with the level of our spirit world.

I sprang forward, hoping against hope that I might help. Jeremiah was before me. He flung himself at the body . . . stretched himself upon it, his lips against those of the choking girl.

"Lucifer, aid me!" he babbled.

As he continued some horrible ritual, Mather's body became indistinct. It was sinking — like smoke — into Mary's twitching form. Simultaneously, a nebulous shape materialized, exactly as if . . . I screamed at Mather, trying in vain to tear him from his prey.

Bradley dived upon us. He gripped the body, now apparently lifeless; kicking furiously, he regained the surface.

I recalled the shape that had nebulized beside Mary's body. There it still lay in the wavering light. If I had not seen Bradley bear her to the surface, I would have sworn that no change had taken place.

This being was ethereal, beautiful, helpless, and on my side of the barrier. I knelt and chafed her wrists to save her soul.

"How dark it is!" she gasped at last as she sat up. "Oh! Thank you for rescuing me, but . . ." She stared upward at the mirror surface of the lake. "Where is this place?"

I STAMMERED some inane nonsense and tried to forget that we were naked. She was shaking with cold so I led her to where the sun warmed our barren land. As the light brightened she discovered the loss of her bathing suit, gasped, tried to cover her lovely breasts with her tiny hands, then relaxed with a hopeless laugh.

"You're the telegrapher who was killed, aren't you?" she asked in a voice which she tried to make matter-of-fact.

"Yes. Frank Easton, at your service."

"Then we're both dead?" She screwed up her eyes.

"I don't think you are." We had reached the rock, so I pointed to where Bradley was giving first aid . . . to what?

"How odd," Mary gasped.

"Tom doesn't know I'm dead." She gave a little cry, then, as the body on the beach moaned and struggled. "Look, I'm coming to! Oh, Mr. Easton, tell me what this means."

I blurted out the truth and her fists doubled in fury.

"I'm not going to let him get away with this . . . this body-snapping," she stormed. "I've heard of Jeremiah; people around here still talk of his deviltries. That's what keeps spirits earthbound, perhaps — the remembrance of their misdeeds by the living. Wait till I get my hands on him . . . on me!" She raced for the spot where the body was being revived.

Mather was on the alert. Before Mary could reach him — this is involved but I know no better way to express it — he coughed the last water from his stolen lungs and stood up.

Mary flung herself upon her own body — or rather, she flung herself through it. Dismayed, she tried again. After a third attempt, she turned back in my direction.

"Do something!" she raged. "Don't stand there like a — like a peeled worm. Oh, why can't I . . ." She burst into a flood of tears, and flung herself on the sand.

"I don't know *what* to do, Miss Horton." I patted her shoulder, since I could think of nothing better.

She sat up, rubbing her fists into her eyes like a little girl. "Must I stay in this awful place?"

"I don't know. We'll find out tomorrow, perhaps. Now we must gather moss to sleep under."

"Can't we have a fire?"

"Fire doesn't seem to burn over here. I've tried knocking rocks together until my fingers bled."

By the time our beds were completed, the sun was setting and a danker chill came creeping from the lowlands. I then collected double handfuls of mushrooms and snails. Mary ate the things with only the faintest hesitation. Soon afterward she burrowed into her moss pile.

For a long while I sat on the rock, which still was warm. What was I to do? Jeremiah had committed a crime far worse than that of burning witches. How could I bring him to justice?

Jim had once mentioned that an honest medium lived at Harristown. Perhaps I could reach him through her and get him to help. This thought made me feel better as I crawled into "bed".

WHEN I awakened, Mary was standing on the rock, beautiful as a nymph. "Look, Frank," she cried. "Maybe I'm going to be drowned again." Mary's earthly counterpart, none the worse from yesterday's experi-

ence, was striking out boldly across the lake. "Here comes Tom," she whispered, as if watching a motion picture.

Bradley raced down to the shore, shouting for the other to return. Then, tossing off his coat and shoes, he dived in.

The thing that had been Mary swam with long, easy strokes, Its intention plainly was to mock us. Its face had lost much of Mary's sweetness and assumed something of Jeremiah's nature. The mouth was hard; the eyes glittered.

Just as she — he — oh, damn such contradictions — just as *It* swam within a few feet of our vantage point, Bradley arrived. Jeremiah struck him contemptuously across the face. Thinking this a symptom of hysteria, the boy caught the supposedly drowning girl under the armpits. In turn, Mather threw both arms about the youth's neck and sank into deep water.

They struggled for what seemed many minutes. But Bradley knew a thing or two; he drew up his knees, kicked the other's body from him and broke free.

Jeremiah promptly struck out for shore. Once there, he threw up both arms, as though trying to grasp the whole world in a frenzy of animal joy, and ran toward the house.

"It's murderous." Marv's teeth chattered. "It meant to kill Tom. It may attack Dad or Mother.

Is there no way of stopping the thing?"

"Let's go to Harristown and try to get a warning through."

After a breakfast of the inevitable we set out along a dim path far below the level of Massachusetts' terrain. Before we had gone five miles, Mary's feet were bleeding and I had to carry her over the roughest spots.

When we walked down Harristown's main street nobody noticed us, nor did our passage cast shadows on the pavement. Once a dog leaped out of our way with a snarl; that was all.

We turned into a lane and approached the cabin where "Aunt Matt" Hawthorne eked out a living as medium and midwife. The place thronged with astral inhabitants. Although Jim had told me what to expect, I felt my hair stir. Mary screamed and covered her eyes.

Monsters they were — misshapen, grotesque, pasty-gray, sprawling. Some, without limbs, writhed along the ground.

A few beings that looked human struggled to break through the throng that clustered about a wrinkled woman in the cobwebbed living room. They were hurled back, bruised and bleeding, whenever they approached her.

"What are those nightmares?" Marv panted.

"They're Elementals — beings that have never advanced far

enough on the scale of evolution to possess bodies."

"Why do they howl and fight?"

"See that man who is struggling to retain his place beside the medium?" I asked. "He wants to get some message through. The things are preventing him out of sheer deviltry and because they have no other form of amusement. They're dragging him away. He's down! He's up again!" The victim was tossed from hand to hand and flung, bleeding, at our feet. A three-legged thing took its place beside Aunt Matt and screamed obscenities.

THE MAN picked himself up, felt for broken bones, and sighed: "No use trying to get through. The hellions are out."

"Perhaps if the three of us . . ."

"Not today. I'm practically dead. I mean, I'm licked." He staggered away as his conquerors whooped.

"Must we fight those pawing things?" asked Mary.

"Yes. And even if we reach the medium, our message probably will be garbled when she repeats it."

A dwarf with one malignant eye caught sight of us and calling attention to a new sport, the crowd surged toward us.

Mary screamed — one high-pitched cry of agony as a thing touched her. "Take me away, Frank, take me away," she

moaned, "before I go mad and gibber, too."

She could not sleep that night. For hours I rocked her in my arms, talked soothing nonsense, assured her that all would be well, fought back my hopelessness. I forgot my misery in trying to assuage hers, and, for the first time, a sort of peace descended on me.

"There must be some other way," Mary said when the return of daylight inspired us. "Let's go to my house. Perhaps Jeremiah can be caught off guard."

An unexpected difficulty arose; the level of the astral sphere was beneath that of the Horton basement. In the dank gloom where we estimated the house to be we sat down in despair. I puzzled over the thing until at last a possible solution came. "We might build a rock pile. Perhaps we could make it high enough for the top to penetrate into the ground floor."

"I'll help," Mary said grimly. "Anything's better than returning to Harristown."

We pooled what remnants of geometry we could remember to locate our tower. Using the lake as a base we triangulated and paced off the distances. Then we set to work. Muscle-straining, backbreaking labor it was, because we had no levers with which to move boulders.

Gradually, the pile took form; five, ten, fifteen feet up it went.

Then, one evening when we had about decided that our location was wrong, a light flashed! One of Horton's servants had turned on a light in the wine cellar.

Heartened, we kept working until, by standing tall, our eyes came above the level of the living room floor.

The place was strewn with empty bottles. A window had been broken. Cushions were in disarray. Bradley, dead drunk, lay snoring on the divan.

Jeremiah was dancing amongst this wreckage, apparently to the sound of a record player. The fact that we heard no sound and had a worm's eye view made the scene doubly dreadful.

Round and round in a circle it had chalked on the Persian rug the creature whirled and pirouetted, in some heathen temple dance.

"It's wrapped in one of our red silk window-hangings," Mary breathed in my ear. "What's it doing?"

"Trying to evoke the Devil, I think. Jeremiah boasted they had an understanding."

WHATEVER MATHER'S intentions were, he misjudged the physical powers of his new body. In the midst of a genuflection it staggered and sprawled, red hanging and white limbs, in a pitiful heap.

"Now's your chance," I gritted.

But the unconscious form was far out of our reach, no matter how we strained. The opportunity passed in a flash, too; Jeremiah sat up and moved farther away, holding his stolen head and moaning.

"Where are your parents, Mary? Do you suppose it has ki . . . has driven them away?"

"No. Mother and Dad are on a short trip. Bradley was to have stayed at the Peeksford Hotel until they returned. Poor Tom. He looks half dead."

"What shall we do next?"

"Wait until they return, I guess. Father and I understand each other very well. Maybe I can reach his subconscious, like I used to do when we tried PSI experiments on rainy afternoons. Oh, I wish I really had studied such things, instead of playing around with them."

We now spent most of our time shivering on the tower top; therefore, we were witnesses when the broker and his apple-cheeked wife walked into the midst of a drunken orgy. Bradley must have invited his bohemian acquaintances down from Boston. The living room was full of singing, shouting, drunken bacchantes.

I had hoped the Hortons would realize at once that their daughter was possessed, but had underestimated Jeremiah. The talent that had allowed him to hang most of the blame for his

crimes upon his half-brother came instantly to his aid.

He flung himself, sobbing, on Mrs. Horton's bosom, denied all responsibility and accused Bradley and the rest. So realistic was the performance that the old folks could not help believe it. Horton drove Bradley and the others out of the room. Then, his rage cooling, he patted his wronged darling's head, remembered that, after all, he was a business man, removed several packets of bills from a briefcase, and deposited them in a wall safe.

"Did you see that creature watch him?" Mary cried as the Hortons led the weeping Jeremiah from the room. "He always would carry cash around. I'm scared to death." She laughed shakily then, realizing how ridiculous her last words sounded.

Servants cleaned up the living room and put out the lamps. For an hour or so nothing happened. Then a crack of light showed as the hall door was pushed open. Jeremiah slipped through and headed for the safe.

"He found the combination," Mary groaned. "I left it in my desk."

As Jeremiah was stuffing the bills into a handbag, Mrs. Horton entered in search of her daughter. The impostor either became rattled or was overcome by blood lust. Mrs. Horton screamed once before he caught her by the throat.

A pajama-clad figure ran into the room and flung Mather against a wall. He rebounded, snatched a bookend and struck Horton a glancing blow on the temple.

The broker sank to his knees, red showing in his white hair. Jeremiah raised the piece of metal for a finishing blow just as servants, roused by the clamor, came to the rescue. It took them ten minutes to subdue the ravening monster.

MARY HAD fainted. I picked her up, clambered down the rock pile somehow and carried her to our "home". There, despite my efforts at encouragement, she buried her face in the moss and cried herself to sleep.

Covering her thin body as best I could, I set off for Harkistown. The chance of getting through to Aunt Matt was slim and the chance of having any message from the spirit world believed and acted upon was even slimmer. Nevertheless, Aunt Matt was now my only hope.

When I reached her bedroom, I found the old woman sleeping soundly. (The Elementals had gone elsewhere for amusement.) Paper and pencil lay on a rickety table at her side. I whispered to her to pick up the pencil but she only moaned and stirred fretfully.

"Aunt Matt!" I yelled at her in desperation. "Pick up that

damned pencil and take a message!"

"Yes! I hear you, Hiawatha," she gabbed, sitting bolt upright and adjusting her nightgown with exaggerated modesty although she was still half asleep. "Tell me what to write."

"Jim Breedon. Railway Station. Peeksford, Mass . . ." I dictated and Aunt Matt's hand scrawled the words. Then, as I hesitated while trying to frame a message that would have some chance of being believed, the hand continued to write! "Jim, darling," ran the words, "your Great Aunt Minnie says to tell you she is well and happy. Hiawatha."

An Elemental, attracted by my shout, had pre-empted the medium's ear.

I tried to continue but the lopsided creature, having long amused itself with this sort of thing, blocked my best efforts. I pushed it away but might as well have fought a mass of jelly. I tried shouting again. It hissed obscenities. Only a meaningless jumble, in which my name luckily was mingled, appeared on the pad.

Malformed things now were flocking from all directions. I would be swept from my vantage point in minutes. Realizing my danger, the traditional distress signal of all telegraphers flashed through my mind. "S.O.S." I screamed again and again while mildewed hands

tore me. I fell; scrambled; won free. The mob did not follow; these freaks had no more power of co-operation than lunatics and thought only for the moment. I crept away bleeding, more doubtful than ever that Jim would receive my message or investigate if he did.

Looking like the ghost of a ghost, Mary was calling my name as I staggered back to the lake. She caught me as I collapsed and made a fuss over me, as women will, while I told her what had happened.

"We'll have to go back together," I said at last. "I have a plan for getting through if Jim comes. If he doesn't come, we're stymied."

AFTER MARY had fed me and cleaned my scratches she let me sleep while she reconnoitered her former home. Returning, she reported that Jeremiah was locked in and under the attention of a psychiatrist brought from New York.

"A psychiatrist," I groaned. "Now we're in even worse trouble. No head-shrinker has any belief in life after death."

"Dr. Martin has an open mind about such things, I believe," she answered hesitantly. "He's really a psychotherapist rather than a psychiatrist, and a follower of Jung rather than Freud. He's a good friend of ours and seemed quite interested, the last time he paid us a visit, with what Dad

and I could do with Rhine cards."

"Well, I hope his mind is open enough for the wind to blow through," I said as I dragged my aching body upright. "What I have in mind would jolt even Sir Oliver Lodge."

We spent two days hanging around Aunt Matt's cabin without catching sight of Breeden. I went over to the Peeksford station once but he didn't sense my presence; just sat staring at the office wall and chainsmoking. I told Mary I was sure he wasn't coming but she wouldn't hear of leaving Harristown. In this she was right, because on the third day, my friend came swinging shamefacedly down Main Street and to Aunt Matt's home. When the medium showed him my garbled message, he said nothing; just shrugged, lit a cigarette, and sat down in her best chair to await developments.

The old woman sank into trance. Elementals gathered to have fun. I picked up a rock in either hand. Mary did likewise. We charged the scurrying mob!

The unexpectedness of our attack swept the Elementals before us and we reached Aunt Matt's side. Fighting back to back with me, striking at the crooked faces like an Amazon, Mary kept us safe.

But to get a message through that bedlam seemed impossible. The medium would pick up a

word from me, then a string of nonsense. Soon I could see that Jim was beginning to lose what little faith he had had in her ability. I tried placing my hand over hers while I told her what to write. Again and again it was snatched away while others gained control of the pencil.

I was growing desperate, for I knew Mary could not hold out long. Then I recalled that the S.O.S. had gotten through when words failed and forced the crone to put dots and dashes on her pad.

The interferers were at a loss for once. Morse code meant nothing to them. They must have come to the conclusion that I had adopted their own antics, for the pressure against us relaxed.

"- - - - - - - - - - (This is Frank Easton)" I tapped.

Jim leaped to his feet with a shout. Realizing that I had stolen a march, the monsters returned to the attack. I was torn from Aunt Matt's side and regained it only after a heartbreakingly struggle, during which the pad had been filled with Great Aunt Minnie's being happy and Uncle Frank sending his love — trash that is the despair of all who study psychic phenomena. This slow method of writing was impossible. I needed a key or a bug to speed things up.

.. - - - - (Mary Horton in danger)" I made the pencil say, although it took some doing. Then, in jerks between spells of fighting: "Bring medium to Horton home tomorrow. Also key and sounder. Can't work here."

A moan from Mary warned me her strength was ebbing. The press of fetid bodies had become unendurable. Over the squirming things we had stunned, we struggled to safety.

MOUNTING OUR pyramid early next day, we soon saw Jim enter the living room. He must have talked to the older people by phone because both welcomed him — a little hesitantly, it is true, but my friend was convincing. Within minutes he had learned the whole story.

Jim left the room, to return with a be-shawled and bent Aunt Matt. A tall man wearing a Vandyke also appeared. The latter questioned Jim closely, stroking his whiskers, but finally nodded his consent to some proposal.

The medium was placed in a chair near the middle of the living room floor, and by the grace of God, within my reach. Jim brought out telegraph key, batteries, a sounder and a portable typewriter. The key he placed under Aunt Matt's fingers.

As all this was being arranged — in pantomime to us, of course — a crescendo of howls and yells

arose from the direction of Hарristown. "The Campbells are coming!" Mary said.

"Can you hold them off?"

"I'll do my best, Frank." She stood on tiptoe to kiss me.

The instrument clicked tentatively as Jim adjusted it. Mounting our highest boulder, I clutched Aunt Matt's impalpable hand — or at least clutched *at* it — and began sending.

The faces of those crowded around Breeden turned white as he typed out my message. When all the details had been transferred to a pile of paper lying beside his "mill" I asked for questions to be written large and held up for me to read.

"How do you suggest that Miss Horton be freed from this, shall we say, incubus?" Dr. Martin wrote first.

Mary screamed. She was being dragged by the arms over the pyramid side by a bloated greenie. Even worse things were swarming upward like a wave of rats. I snatched a boulder and brought it down on that hideous face. When it splashed I cheered and managed to sweep the top of the pile clear. This gave enough respite for the girl to regain her breath and renew the struggle.

I could see that the long pause before I answered was making those in the physical world even more dubious than they had been. Shakily I tapped out:

"Jeremiah Mather has told me that, during his witchburnings, he was obsessed by the fear that he would meet a similar fate . . ." I stopped here to help Mary repulse still another attack, then went on: "Turn his fear against him." Again I stopped to wipe away blood which was dripping down my arm from a deep scratch on my shoulder.

"What do you mean?" wrote the psychotherapist, whose eyes were shining with excitement.

"Build a pyre. Place Jeremiah on it and fire it. His terror may drive him from the body he stole so that Mary can take his place. Then tear away the brands and release her."

"I will take no part in such a hellish scheme" scribbled Horton.

"Mary," I cried above the uproar on our side of the barrier. "isn't there any way you can convince them?"

"Ask Mother where I buried my broken doll in the garden," she panted as she twisted the neck of a snakelike thing.

A SMILE BROKE over Mrs Horton's drawn face when I did this.

"I am convinced, Mary," she wrote. "Only the two of us knew about that burial."

Horton still shook his white head.

"Speak to him, Mary," I urged. "Perhaps he will hear."

"Father," she cried, holding

out her bare and bloody arms to him while I defended our fortress. "Here I am, Daddy. Help me."

Some echo must have reached him. He hesitated and looked at Dr. Martin for advice.

"I am in favor of the experiment," the psychotherapist wrote after considerable whisker stroking. "We have nothing to lose and Mary . . . the thing that calls itself Mary . . . is beyond all cure."

So this modern witchburning was agreed upon after much bitter argument. Before dawn, Jeremiah was told that he was to meet the fate he had brought upon so many innocents and was dragged, kicking and frothing, to a great pile of wood near the lake edge.

"How will they know when we change places?" Mary moaned as they bound the fiend to a stake in the pyre's center.

"Don't worry," I answered as I worried madly. How would they, could they know?

Horton tried to light the faggots but shrank back. His wife snatched the torch and applied it. In the growing flicker, Jeremiah's stolen face was, at first, as beautiful and serene as that of a saint. He still hoped to break them down. But, as the heat increased, the face contorted. The mouth drooled. The eyes started. He may have been seeing in review all those poor

souls he had helped send to this same fate.

He screamed. The sound — first to penetrate our astral realm — was answered in chorus by Elementals that had gathered, scenting the execution as buzzards do carrion.

"I heard him." Mary clung to me. "Maybe we'll win."

Jeremiah clung doggedly to the body he had ravished. He wept and pleaded. He hurled curses. Long minutes later, as his flesh cringed and his eyebrows frizzled, he tried to escape.

Skinny Elemental fingers reached hungrily for him. He drew back until he could stand the flames no longer. Then, as the girl's head fell forward on her breast, Mather's gaunt form detached itself slowly, fearfully, like mist rising from water.

"Quick, Mary," I cried. "Through the fire you go."

"Goodbye, dear Frank." She kissed me for the second time. "I'd almost rather stay, but somehow I can't." Setting her teeth, she leaped through the wall of fire. And Aunt Matt, who had been leaning on her cane muttering prayers — or incantations — screamed: "Put it out! Put it out!" The others leaped to obey.

A struggle was in progress on my side of the barrier. Jeremiah was at bay. Ringed about him,

scratching with dirty finger and toenails, was the entire crew of Elementals. No longer was there any lack of co-operation. Obeying a will transcending their own, they fell on Mather hooting: "Sacrilege. Sacrilege. Kill! Kill!"

He slipped and went to his knees on the damp moss. He saw me and made his last hypocritical appeal: "Help! Help me, friend!"

As I leaped forward he was sucked under the mob like a chip in a whirlpool. For a long time the obscene heap writhed beside a dying fire. When it untangled, no trace of Jeremiah remained.

* * * *

There is not much more to tell. Mary revived, none the worse except for singed hair and minor burns, but looking woefully sad, a thing that cheered me when it shouldn't have.

I reconciled myself to continue the dreary monotony of a half-life brightened by occasional glimpses of her. But a strange thing has happened. While foraging for supper, I came across the path Hank Gordon took. How silly of me not to have seen it then.

At the end of that path there is a lightening of this eternal gloom. Tomorrow I follow that gleam.

All The Stain Of Long Delight

by Jerome Clark

"Beer," the fat man said.

He took a sip, sighed hoarsely, and looked around. The place was silent. In the backroom two pool balls hit each other and echoed hollowly. No one spoke.

There was a man next to him, old, his skin almost flaky. He was leaning over his glass, his head unmoving.

The fat man felt uneasy. He cleared his throat. "Hot day, eh?"

He sat, peering glassy-eyed over his half-drunk mug. He didn't move.

"I said, 'Hot day, ain't it?'" the fat man repeated, louder this time. There was no answer. He was still staring at something over his glass.

The fat man shrugged. "Don't this guy talk much?" he asked.

"No," the bartender said. There was a glint in his eyes. The fat man started and looked again, but it was gone.

He spun around on the stool and glanced at a table where three men sat unmoving over an opened deck of cards.

Sauntering over, he reached across, then stopped as he thought of something. "You don't mind if I play, do you?"

"Play as long as you want to," the bartender said from behind him.

The fat man touched the cards, and immediately his hand flew back as if stung. They were dusty, old, with the dust of . . . of years?

There was a movement in the back room. Suddenly it occurred to him that he would be playing for a long, long time.

Skulls In The Stars

by Robert E. Howard

He told how murders walk the earth
Beneath the curse of Cain,
With crimson clouds before their eyes
And flames about their brain:
For blood has left upon their souls
Its everlasting stain.

—Hood

THERE ARE TWO roads to Torkertown. One, the shorter and more direct route, leads across a barren upland moor, and the other, which is much longer, winds its tortuous way in and out among the hummocks and quagmires of the swamps, skirting the low hills to the east. It was a dangerous and tedious trail; so Solomon Kane halted in amazement when a breathless youth from the village he had just left, overtook him and implored him for God's sake to take the swamp road.

"The swamp road!" Kane stared at the boy.

He was a tall, gaunt man, was Solomon Kane, his darkly pallid face and deep brooding eyes made more somber by the drab Puritanical garb he affected.

"Yes, sir, 'tis safer," the youngster answered to his surprised exclamation.

"Then the moor road must be haunted by Satan himself, for your townsmen warned me against traversing the other."

"Because of the quagmires, sir, that you might not see in the dark. You had better return to the village and continue your journey in the morning, sir."

"Taking the swamp road?"

"Yes, sir."

Kane shrugged and shook his head. "The moon rises almost as soon as twilight dies. By its light I can reach Torkertown in a few hours, across the moor."

"Sir, you had better not. No

A reader suggests that Robert E. Howard is really a pseudonym for Edgar Rice Burroughs, and were there no biographical data available the suggestion would not be a bad one. There are, indeed, many similarities between the two, but the differences become more pronounced when you read their stories carefully. Almost any paragraph in this story (and in every other Howard weird tale which is his work alone) shows word-choices and word and phrase arrangement that give a constant cursive and sibilant effect, almost like a snake weaving its way through grass. In addition there is such a leaning upon alliteration (particularly in sentences where sibilation does not occur so prominently) as to suggest poetry rather than prose. Howard was also a poet. Both elements can be found in Burroughs, true, but not nearly to the same extent; one does not get the feeling with the older man, as one does with Howard, that English is almost being transformed into a Latin language. Both men dealt with strange peoples, lost cities and races (many of which appeared in Africa), and Burroughs could produce quite eerie effects at times when he wanted to. But he never quite touched upon the core of prehuman, subhuman, and superhuman horror that was always at Howard's fingertips once the younger man got into the swing of story production. Robert E. Howard was in or nearing his sixth year when *Under the Moons of Mars* (title changed to *A Princess of Mars* for book publication) appeared in *ALL-STORY MAGAZINE* (February-July 1912), and he died in 1936 — June 11th, eleven years and eleven days after his first published story, *Spear and Fang* appeared in *WEIRD TALES*. A short novella, *Wolfshead*, made a greater impact in 1926, but it was in the August 1928 issue of *WT*, when *Red Shadows* introduced an English Puritan named Solomon Kane, that Howard really hit his stride. Later he would introduce Kull, King of Valusia, Bran Mak Morn, and Conan; the last named is his most famous character, appearing late in 1932, but many readers, including this one, regretted that he did not return occasionally to his earlier characters to leaven the Conan cycle. Another prime difference between Burroughs and Howard is that, for all his faults, Burroughs had a warm sense of humor and could present believable and likeable people; ERB had a basic love of life and his fellow man. Howard showed no trace of humor (sardonic wit is not humor) and the underlying philosophy of his fiction is bitter, misanthropic, and nihilistic. This does not demean the impact of his tales — for, like ERB, he was a teller of tales rather than a master of story-construction. We have received innumerable requests for Howard's pre-Conan stories, dealing with his earlier characters, and the present story was specifically urged upon us by HARVEY STONE.

one ever goes that way. There are no houses at all upon the moor, while in the swamp there is the house of old Ezra who lives there all alone since his maniac cousin, Gideon, wandered off and died in the swamp

and was never found — and old Ezra, though a miser, would not refuse you lodging should you decide to stop until morning. Since you must go, you had better go the swamp road."

Kane eyed the boy piercing-

ly. The lad squirmed and shuffled his feet.

"Since this moor road is so dour to wayfarers," said the Puritan, "why did not the villagers tell me the whole tale, instead of vague mouslings?"

"Men like not to talk of it, sir. We hoped that you would take the swamp road after the men advised you to, but when we watched and saw that you turned not at the forks, they sent me to run after you and beg you to reconsider."

"Name of the Devil!" exclaimed Kane sharply, the unaccustomed oath showing his irritation; "the swamp road and the moor road — what is it that threatens me and why should I go miles out of my way and risk the bogs and mires?"

"Sir," said the boy, dropping his voice and drawing closer, "we be simple villagers who like not to talk of such things lest foul fortune befall us, but the moor road is a way accurst and hath not been traversed by any of the countryside for a year or more. It is death to walk those moors by night, as hath been found by some score of unfortunates. Some foul horror haunts the way and claims men for his victims."

"So? And what is this thing like?"

"No man knows. None has ever seen it and lived, but latefarers have heard terrible laughter far out on the fen and men

have heard the horrid shrieks of its victims. Sir, in God's name return to the village, there pass the night, and tomorrow take the swamp trail to Yorkertown."

Far back in Kane's gloomy eyes a scintillant light had begun to glimmer, like a witch's torch glinting under fathoms of cold gray ice. His blood quickened. Adventure! The lure of life-risk and battle! The thrill of breathtaking, touch-and-go drama! Not that Kane recognized his sensations as such. He sincerely considered that he voiced his real feelings when he said, "These things be deeds of some power of evil. The lords of darkness have laid a curse upon the country. A strong man is needed to combat Satan and his might. Therefore I go, who have defied him many a time."

"Sir," the boy began, then closed his mouth as he saw the futility of argument. He only added, "The corpses of the victims are bruised and torn, sir."

He stood there at the cross-roads, sighing regretfully as he watched the tall, rangy figure swinging up the road that led toward the moors.

THE SUN WAS setting as Kane came over the brow of the low hill which debouched into the upland fen. Huge and blood-red it sank down behind the sultry horizon of the moors, seeming to touch the rank grass with fire; so for a moment the watch-

er seemed to be gazing out across a sea of blood. Then the dark shadows came gliding from the east, the western blaze faded, and Solomon Kane struck out boldly in the gathering darkness.

The road was dim from disuse but was clearly defined. Kane went swiftly but warily, sword and pistols at hand. Stars blinked out and night winds whispered among the grass like weeping specters. The moon began to rise, lean and haggard, like a skull among the stars.

Then suddenly Kane stopped short. From somewhere in front of him sounded a strange and eerie echo — or something like an echo. Again, this time louder. Kane started forward again. Were his senses deceiving him? No!

Far out, there pealed a whisper of frightful laughter. And again, closer this time. No human being ever laughed like that — there was no mirth in it, only hatred and horror and soul-destroying terror. Kane halted. He was not afraid, but for a second he was almost unnerved. Then stabbing through that awesome laughter, came the sound of a scream that was undoubtedly human. Kane started forward, increasing his gait. He cursed the illusive lights and flickering shadows which veiled the moor in the rising moon and made accurate sight impossible. The laughter continued, growing

louder, as did the screams. Then sounded faintly the drum of frantic human feet. Kane broke into a run.

Some human was being hunted to his death out there on the fen, and by what manner of horror God only knew. The sound of the flying feet halted abruptly and the screaming rose unbearably, mingled with other sounds unnamable and hideous. Evidently the man had been overtaken, and Kane, his flesh crawling, visualized some ghastly fiend of the darkness crouching on the back of its victim — crouching and tearing.

Then the noise of a terrible and short struggle came clearly through the abysmal silence of the fen and the footfalls began again, but stumbling and uneven. The screaming continued, but with a gasping gurgle. The sweat stood cold on Kane's forehead and body. This was heaping horror on horror in an intolerable manner.

God, for a moment's clear light! The frightful drama was being enacted within a very short distance of him, to judge by the ease with which the sounds reached him. But this hellish half-light veiled all in shifting shadows, so that the moors appeared a haze of blurred illusions, and stunted trees and bushes seemed like giants.

Kane shouted, striving to increase the speed of his advance. The shrieks of the unknown

broke into a hideous shrill squealing; again there was the sound of a struggle, and then from the shadows of the tall grass a thing came reeling — a thing that had once been a man — a gore-covered, frightful thing that fell at Kane's feet and writhed and groveled and raised its terrible face to the rising moon, and gibbered and yammered, and fell down again and died in its own blood.

THE MOON WAS up now, and the light was better. Kane bent above the body, which lay stark in its mutilation, and he shuddered — a rare thing for him, who had seen the deeds of the Spanish Inquisition and the witch-finders.

Some wayfarer, he supposed. Then like a hand of ice on his spine he was aware that he was not alone. He looked up, his cold eyes piercing the shadows whence the dead man had staggered. He saw nothing, but he knew — he felt — that other eyes gave back his stare, terrible eyes not of this Earth. He straightened and drew a pistol, waiting. The moonlight spread like a lake of pale blood over the moor, and trees and grasses took on their proper sizes.

The shadows melted, and Kane *saw!* At first he thought it only a shadow of mist, a wisp of moor fog that swayed in the tall grass before him. He gazed.

More illusion, he thought. Then the thing began to take on shape, vague and indistinct. Two hideous eyes flamed at him — eyes which held all the stark horror which has been the heritage of man since the fearful dawn ages — eyes frightful and insane, with an insanity transcending Earthly insanity. The form of the thing was misty and vague, a brain-shattering travesty on the human form, like, yet horribly unlike. The grass and bushes beyond showed clearly, through it.

Kane felt the blood pound in his temples, yet he was as cold as ice. How such an unstable being as that which wavered before him could harm a man in a physical way was more than he could understand, yet the red horror at his feet gave mute testimony that the fiend could act with terrible material effect.

Of one thing Kane was sure: there would be no hunting of him across the dreary moors, no screaming and fleeing to be dragged down again and again. If he must die he would die in his tracks, his wounds in front.

Now a vague and grisly mouth gaped wide and the demoniac laughter again shrieked out, soul-shaking in its nearness. And in the midst of that threat of doom, Kane deliberately leveled his long pistol and fired. A maniacal yell of rage and mockery answered the report, and the thing came at him like

a flying sheet of smoke, long shadowy arms stretched to drag him down.

Kane, moving with the dynamic speed of a famished wolf, fired the second pistol with as little effect, snatched his long rapier from its sheath and thrust into the center of the misty attacker. The blade sang as it passed clear through, encountering no solid resistance, and Kane felt icy fingers grip his limbs, bestial talons tear his garments and the skin beneath.

He dropped the useless sword and sought to grapple with his foe. It was like fighting a floating mist, a flying shadow armed with daggerlike claws. His savage blows met empty air, his leanly mighty arms, in whose grasp strong men had died, swept nothingness and clutched emptiness. Naught was solid or real save the flaying, apelike fingers with their crooked talons, and the crazy eyes which burned into the shuddering depths of his soul.

KANE REALIZED THAT he was in a desperate plight indeed. Already his garments hung in tatters and he bled from a score of deep wounds. But he never flinched, and the thought of flight never entered his mind. He had never fled from a single foe, and had the thought occurred to him he would have flushed with shame.

He saw no help for it now,

but that his form should lie there beside the fragments of the other victim, but the thought held no terrors for him. His only wish was to give as good an account of himself as possible before the end came, and if he could, to inflict some damage on his unearthly foe.

There above the dead man's torn body, man fought with demon under the pale light of the rising moon, with all the advantages with the demon, save one. And that one was enough to overcome all the others. For if abstract hate may bring into material substance a ghostly thing, may not courage, equally abstract, form a concrete weapon to combat that ghost?

Kane fought with his arms and his feet and his hands, and he was aware at last that the ghost began to give back before him, and the fearful laughter changed to screams of baffled fury. For man's only weapon is courage that flinches not from the gates of Hell itself, and against such not even the legions of Hell can stand.

Of this Kane knew nothing; he only knew that the talons which tore and rended him seemed to grow weaker and wavering, that a wild light grew and grew in the horrible eyes. And reeling and gasping, he rushed in, grappled the thing at last and threw it, and as they tumbled about on the moor and it writhed and lapped his limbs

like a serpent of smoke, his flesh crawled and his hair stood on end, for he began to understand its gibbering.

He did not hear and comprehend as a man hears and comprehends the speech of a man, but the frightful secrets it imparted in whisperings and yammerings and screaming silences sank fingers of ice into his soul, and he knew.

2

THE HUT OF old Ezra the miser stood by the road in the midst of the swamp, half screened by the sullen trees which grew about it. The walls were rotting, the roof crumbling, and great, pallid and green fungus-monsters clung to it and writhed about the doors and windows, as if seeking to peer within. The trees leaned above it and their gray branches intertwined so that it crouched in the semi-darkness like a monstrous dwarf over whose shoulder ogres leer.

The road which wound down into the swamp, among rotting stumps and rank hummocks and scummy, snake-haunted pools and bogs, crawled past the hut. Many people passed that way these days, but few saw old Ezra, save a glimpse of a yellow face, peering through the fungus-screened windows, itself like an ugly fungus.

Old Ezra the miser partook much of the quality of the

swamp, for he was gnarled and bent and sullen; his fingers were like clutching parasitic plants and his locks hung like drab moss above eyes trained to the murk of the swamplands. His eyes were like a dead man's, yet hinted of depths abysmal and loathsome as the dead lakes of the swamplands.

These eyes gleamed now at the man who stood in front of his hut. This man was tall and gaunt and dark, his face was haggard and claw-marked, and he was bandaged of arm and leg. Somewhat behind this man stood a number of villagers.

"You are Ezra of the swamp road?"

"Aye, and what want ye of me?"

"Where is your cousin Gideon, the maniac youth who abode with you?"

"Gideon?"

"Aye."

"He wandered away into the swamp and never came back. No doubt he lost his way and was set upon by wolves or died in a quagmire or was struck by an adder."

"How long ago?"

"Over a year."

"Aye. Hark ye, Ezra the miser. Soon after your cousin's disappearance, a countryman, coming home across the moors, was set upon by some unknown fiend and torn to pieces, and thereafter it became death to cross those moors. First men of

the countryside, then strangers who wandered over the fen, fell to the clutches of the thing. Many men have died, since the first one.

"Last night I crossed the moors, and heard the flight and pursuing of another victim, a stranger who knew not the evil of the moors. Ezra the miser, it was a fearful thing, for the wretch twice broke from the fiend, terribly wounded, and each time the demon caught and dragged him down again. And at last he fell dead at my very feet, done to death in a manner that would freeze the statue of a saint."

The villagers moved restlessly and murmured fearfully to each other, and old Ezra's eyes shifted furtively. Yet the somber expression of Solomon Kane never altered, and his condor-like stare seemed to transfix the miser.

"Aye, aye!" muttered old Ezra hurriedly; "a bad thing, a bad thing! Yet why do you tell this thing to me?"

"Aye, a sad thing. Harken farther, Ezra. The fiend came out of the shadows and I fought with it, over the body of its victim. Aye, how I overcame it, I know not, for the battle was hard and long, but the powers of good and light were on my side, which are mightier than the powers of Hell.

"At the last I was stronger, and it broke from me and fled,

and I followed to no avail. Yet, before it fled it whispered to me a monstrous truth."

Old Ezra stared, stared wildly, seemed to shrink into himself. "Nay, why tell me this?" he muttered.

"I returned to the village and told my tale," said Kane, "for I knew that now I had the power to rid the moors of its curse forever. Ezra, come with us!"

"Where?" gasped the miser.

"To the rotting oak on the moors."

EZRA REELED as though struck; he screamed incoherently and turned to flee.

On the instant, at Kane's sharp order, two brawny villagers sprang forward and seized the miser. They twisted the dagger from his withered hand, and pinioned his arms, shuddering as their fingers encountered his clammy flesh.

Kane motioned them to follow, and turning strode up the trail, followed by the villagers, who found their strength taxed to the utmost in their task of bearing their prisoner along. Through the swamp they went and out, taking a little-used trail which led up over the low hills and out on the moors.

The sun was sliding down the horizon and old Ezra stared at it with bulging eyes — stared as if he could not gaze enough. Far out on the moors reared up the great oak tree, like a gib-

bet, now only a decaying shell. There Solomon Kane halted.

Old Ezra writhed in his captor's grasp and made inarticulate noises.

"Over a year ago," said Solomon Kane, "you, fearing that your insane cousin Gideon would tell men of your cruelties to him, brought him away from the swamp by the very trail by which we came, and murdered him here in the night."

Ezra cringed and snarled. "You can not prove this lie!"

Kane spoke a few words to an agile villager. The youth clambered up the rotting bole of the tree and from a crevice, high up, dragged something that fell with a clatter at the feet of the miser. Ezra went limp with a terrible shriek.

The object was a man's skeleton, the skull cleft.

"You — how know you this? You are Satan!" gibbered old Ezra.

Kane folded his arms. "The thing I fought last night told me this thing as we reeled in battle, and I followed it to this tree. *For the fiend is Gideon's ghost!*"

Ezra shrieked again and fought savagely.

"You knew," said Kane somberly, "you knew what thing did these deeds. You feared the ghost of the maniac, and that is why you chose to leave his body on the fen instead of con-

cealing it in the swamp. For you knew the ghost would haunt the place of his death. He was insane in life, and in death he did not know where to find his slayer; else he had come to you in your hut. He hates no man but you, but his mazed spirit can not tell one man from another, and he slays all, lest he let his killer escape. Yet he will know you and rest in peace forever after. Hate hath made of his ghost a solid thing that can rend and slay, and though he feared you terribly in life, in death he fears you not."

Kane halted. He glanced at the sun.

"All this I had from Gideon's ghost, in his yammerings and his whisperings and his shrieking silences. Naught but your death will lay that ghost."

Ezra listened in breathless silence and Kane pronounced the words of his doom.

"A hard thing it is," said Kane somberly, "to sentence a man to death in cold blood and in such a manner as I have in mind, but you must die that others may live — and God knoweth you deserve death."

"You shall not die by noose, bullet or sword, but at the talons of him you slew — for naught else will satiate him."

AT THESE WORDS Ezra's brain shattered, his knees gave way and he fell groveling and

screaming for death, begging them to burn him at the stake, to flay him alive. Kane's face was set like death, and the villagers, the fear rousing their cruelty, bound the screeching wretch to the oak tree, and one of them bade him make his peace with God. But Ezra made no answer, shrieking in a high shrill voice with unbearable monotony. Then the villager would have struck the miser across the face, but Kane stayed him.

"Let him make his peace with Satan whom he is more like to meet," said the Puritan grimly. "The sun is about to set. Loose his cords so that he may work loose by dark, since it is better to meet death free and unshackled than bound like a sacrifice."

As they turned to leave him, old Ezra yammered and gibbered unhuman sounds and then fell silent, staring at the sun with terrible intensity.

They walked away across the fen, and Kane flung a last look at the grotesque form bound to the tree, seeming in the uncertain light like a great fungus growing to the bole. And suddenly the miser screamed hideously, "Death! Death! There are skulls in the stars!"

"Life was good to him, though he was gnarled and churlish and devil," Kane sighed. "Mayhap God has a place for such souls where fire and sacrifice may cleanse them of their dross

as fire cleans the forest of fungous things. Yet my heart is heavy within me."

"Nay, sir," one of the villagers spoke, "you have done but the will of God, and good alone shall come of this night's deed."

"Nay," answered Kane heavily, "I know not — I know not."

The sun had gone down and night spread with amazing swiftness, as if great shadows came rushing down from unknown voids to cloak the world with hurrying darkness. Through the thick night came a weird echo, and the men halted and looked back the way they had come.

Nothing could be seen. The moor was an ocean of shadows and the tall grass about them bent in long waves before the faint wind, breaking the deathly stillness with breathless murmurings.

Then far away the red disk of the moon rose over the fen, and for an instant a grim silhouette was etched blackly against it. A shape came flying across the face of the moon — a bent, grotesque thing whose feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth; and close behind came a thing like a flying shadow — a nameless, shapeless horror.

A moment the racing twain stood out boldly against the moon; then they merged into one unnamable, formless mass, and vanished in the shadows.

Far across the fen sounded a single shriek of terrible laughter.

The Photographs

by Richard Marsh

Richard Marsh (1867-1915) was a British writer of strange and unusual tales, outstanding among them, the novel *The Beetle*. The present story comes from the collection, *The Seen and the Unseen* (1900), and deals with a background which he used at least in one other story: *Canterstone Jail*.

THE GOVERNOR glanced up as Mr. Dodsworth entered.
"Anything the matter, Mr. Dodsworth?"

"Rather a curious thing in connection with the photograph of the man George Solly. If you could spare me a moment I should like to show it to you."

Mr. Dodsworth produced a pocket-book. From the pocket-book he took a photograph. It was the photograph of a man who was attired in prison costume. He was seated on a chair, and he held in front of him a slate on which was written in large letters, "George Solly." Mr. Dodsworth handed this photograph to the governor.

"Well, Mr. Dodsworth, what

is there peculiar about this?"

"There is something about it which is very peculiar indeed, sir, to my eye. If you will look at the photograph closely, you will see that there is something behind the man."

Mr. Paley brought the photograph nearer to his spectacled eyes.

"I see — a sort of shadow. Well?"

"You will notice that that shadow looks very much like a veiled figure — as though a veiled figure was standing at the back of the man Solly."

"Exactly! It does bear some resemblance to a veiled figure. What then?"

"This, sir: that no one was

standing behind Solly. No one, and nothing."

"I don't quite see what you are aiming at, Mr. Dodsworth."

"I am aiming at obtaining your permission to take another negative of the man."

"Another negative! Why? Isn't this a sufficiently good likeness?"

"The likeness is not exactly a bad one, though it is not a very good one, either. But will you allow me to explain, sir? The day on which I took that plate was, for photographic purposes, a very fair day. Solly sat, where the men generally do sit, about fourteen or fifteen feet from the wall. There was nothing between the wall and him. I ought to have had nothing on the plate but Solly. What I want to know is, how came that veiled figure there?"

"Veiled figure! You call the shadow a veiled figure? Don't you think that the resemblance is somewhat fanciful?"

"No, sir, I don't. The focus is not quite right, so that it comes out a little dim; but I have not the slightest doubt that a veiled figure has been introduced into my plate, as standing behind George Solly's chair. I should very much like to take the man again."

"In fact, you are a little curious, eh? I am not sure that I should be justified in allowing you to make experiments at prisoners' expense. I don't know

why they want this man Solly's likeness at Scotland Yard. It is his first offense, he is a good-conduct man, and I don't know why that I am entitled to allow you to put him to unnecessary inconvenience."

"But, to put it on no other grounds, the likeness might be very easily improved."

DR. LIVERMORE had just come in from his rounds. He stretched out his hand to the governor. "Let me look at it," he said.

Mr. Paley handed him the photograph. The doctor examined it.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Dodsworth, that there was nothing behind the man when you exposed this plate?"

"I do. Ask Mr. Murray; he was present at the time."

Chief Warden Murray, standing by, corroborated Mr. Dodsworth's word.

"Then what have you done to the plate since you exposed it? You know, Mr. Dodsworth, this looks to me very much like one of those so-called spirit photographs — you know what I mean — printed from two exposures, and that kind of thing."

"I know what you mean. But I assure you, doctor, that that is a print from an ordinary development of the plate which I exposed in Mr. Murray's presence. It seems to me to be rather a curious thing. How

did that veiled figure get upon that plate?"

"Quite so! If what you say is correct, it is a curious thing. Mr. Paley, I think you might allow Mr. Dodsworth to make another trial. No harm will be done."

The governor gave his permission. Some days afterwards Mr. Dodsworth came into the office just as Mr. Paley had concluded his matutinal interviews with such of the prisoners as were "reported," and such others as desired "to see the governor." Dr. Livermore had also just entered the office to sign the report after making his rounds.

"Well, Mr. Dodsworth," inquired the governor, "and what is the result this time?"

"Before showing you the result, sir, I should like to ask a question or two." Mr. Dodsworth turned to Chief Warden Murray, who had been present, in his official capacity, during the governor's recent interviewing. "You were present, Mr. Murray, when I photographed the man Solly?"

"I was."

"And you also, Slater?" Mr. Dodsworth turned to Warden Slater, who had entered with him. Warden Slater allowed that he was.

"Mr. Murray, where was Solly sitting when I photographed him?"

"He was sitting where the

men always do sit — perhaps twenty feet from the wall."

"Was there anything behind him — I mean, any person, or any object of any kind?"

"There was nothing."

"Could there have been anything behind him without your having been aware of the fact?"

"Certainly not. It was a sunny day, half-past two in the afternoon, and I myself stood within a dozen feet of Solly, to the left of him."

"Slater, is what Mr. Murray says correct?" Warden Slater allowed that it was. Mr. Dodsworth turned to the governor. "I have asked these questions in your presence, Mr. Paley, because the results of my second attempt at photographing the man Solly have been so curious. I availed myself to the full of your permission. I made up my mind that there should be no doubt about the thing this time. So I exposed three separate plates. This is the result of the first exposure, Mr. Paley."

Mr. Dodsworth handed the governor a photograph.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Dodsworth. Is this a photograph of Solly? Who is the woman standing at the back of the chair?"

"Just so — that is what I should like to know. Who is the woman standing at the back of his chair?"

Mr. Paley glanced up in sur-

prise. "What do you mean, Mr. Dodsworth?"

"I mean, sir, what I say — that I should like to know who the woman is standing at the back of his chair. Did you see a woman standing at the back of his chair, Mr. Murray?"

There was no woman."

"Mr. Murray says that there was no woman; the camera seems to suggest that there was."

"Let me look at the thing."

The doctor took the photograph out of the governor's hand. It was the photograph of a man, in prison dress, who was sitting holding out a slate in front of him, on which was written, in characters which were only too legible, his name, "George Solly." Behind the chair on which he was sitting stood a woman. Her pose was curiously natural — not at all the rather-death-than-move pose which is dear to the average photographer. She rested one hand lightly on the man's shoulder, and she was stooping a little forward as if she was curious to see what was written upon the slate which he was holding. Her features were not quite clear, and the whole photograph, so far as she was concerned, was rather dim — but there could be no possible doubt of the fact that she was there.

"Dodsworth," said the doctor, "do you mean to tell me that you have not been trying some little novelty of your own in

the way of spirit photographs?"

"Upon my honor, doctor, no. I looked at that negative directly I got home, and when I saw that woman standing there, well — I declare to you that I felt queer. I have brought that negative here, and the other two negatives. Anybody who knows anything about photography will be able to see at a glance that they have not been tampered with since their original exposure. The print which the doctor has is the result of the first, and this, Mr. Paley, is the result of the second exposure."

MR. DODSWORTH handed Mr. Paley a second photograph. It was a repetition of the first, only, in this case, instead of standing at the back of the man's chair, the woman was kneeling on the ground at his side, and was stretching out her hand and arm in such a manner that they screened the words which were written on the slate.

"You see," commented Mr. Dodsworth, "she has concealed the prisoner's name."

"Do you mean to tell me seriously, Mr. Dodsworth, that you wish me to take this as a bona fide portrait of the man Solly?"

"Here is Mr. Murray, and here is Mr. Slater: they were present at the time — ask them! I took the negatives straight home; they are now lying before you on the table. What you are

holding in your hand was printed, in the usual manner and in the ordinary course, from the second plate which I exposed."

"Then do you wish me to infer that about the matter there is something supernatural, Mr. Dodsworth?"

Mr. Dodsworth shrugged. "It is not for me to draw inferences. I am a photographer. It is my duty to lay before you the results of the camera. That is a print from the third exposure, Mr. Paley."

Mr. Dodsworth laid the third photograph before the governor.

"Really, Mr. Dodsworth, this is too much! Do you expect me to take this as a portrait of the man George Solly? Why, there's nothing of the man to be seen!"

Quite so — the woman has stepped in front of him, and conceals him wholly."

"Do you wish me to infer that the man is behind the woman then? They will require the magnifying glasses which Sam Weller alluded to, if that portrait is to be of much service to them at Scotland Yard."

"I repeat, Mr. Paley, that I wish you to infer nothing. That is the portrait of a woman, which was not taken under ordinary conditions, because, when it was taken, there was no woman there. No woman, that is, who was visible to my eyes, or to Mr. Murray's or to Mr. Slater's, and it was broad day-

light. We saw George Solly, and George Solly only; but it seems that the camera saw something else, and I believe it is a well-authenticated fact that the camera cannot lie."

"That does not look like an ordinary photograph, Mr. Dodsworth."

"It is an extraordinary photograph, Mr. Paley."

"It looks so dim."

"Perhaps it is because the woman was only dimly visible to the exquisitely sensitized plate that she was invisible to our less sensitive eyes."

"You are, in fact, suggesting a ghost story, Mr. Dodsworth."

"I am suggesting a possible explanation, Mr. Paley."

"And I will suggest another." The doctor was holding the photograph in his hand. He was eyeing it askance. "I suggest that I bring my camera to bear. Let me try my hand at photographing this remarkable Mr. Solly. Have I your permission, Mr. Paley?"

The governor leaned back in his chair. He drummed with his finger-ends upon table. His manner became official. "I don't know, doctor, that we are entitled to make experiments upon this man."

"We are entitled to endeavor to get a good portrait of him if we can, without adjuncts. I suppose that you hardly intend to send either of these negatives up to Scotland Yard. You will

have inquiries made into the matter if you do. I don't wish to suggest anything in the least unkind, but I am inclined to think that, although a mere amateur, I shall be able to obtain more satisfactory results than Mr. Dodsworth, the professional. Perhaps when I try the spooks will be sleeping."

"So far as I am concerned I very earnestly hope that the governor will allow you to make the experiment, doctor."

The governor nodded slowly. "The circumstances are peculiar. Ordinarily, doctor I should feel myself bound to decline to accede to your request. The prisoners are not here for us to experiment upon. But — I have received instructions from headquarters to forward to Scotland Yard a negative of the man George Solly. None of Mr. Dodsworth's negatives are suited to the required purpose. It becomes, therefore, my duty to procure one more suitable. It is in the hope that you will be able to provide me with a more suitable negative that, Dr. Livermore, I accede to your request."

II

"WELL, I'VE done it!"

There were in the office when Dr. Livermore made this remark — the governor, Mr. Dodsworth, the chief warden, and the doctor.

"You were all of you present when I made my little trial, so as to the conditions under which that trial was made I presume that we are all agreed. What I photographed was the man George Solly. There was no one else there to photograph. Upon that point there can be no doubt whatever — is that not so, Mr. Paley?"

"Certainly, no one else was there — that is, within the range of your camera."

"Just so; I mean within the range of my camera, so that there can be no reason why the results should not have been satisfactory."

"No reason with which I am acquainted — none whatever. Are the results not satisfactory?"

"Wait one moment and you shall judge for yourself. As you are aware, I went one better than Mr. Dodsworth — I exposed four plates. As each plate was exposed I sealed it up in your presence, without even glancing at it myself. Directly I reached home I forwarded the sealed plates to a firm in town to be developed. I mentioned to no one that I intended to do so. I have mentioned the fact of having done so to no one since. I simply instructed that firm to develop the plates in the ordinary way, to print six impressions from each, and to return both prints and plates to me. The results have only reached me this morning. Here they are.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that these are my plates, that they have not in any way been tampered with, that they have simply been developed by ordinary processes, and that these prints are merely reproductions from the plates. Yet, when I saw these prints, I did what I think you will do — I stared. Mr. Paley, here is the result of the first exposure."

The doctor handed Mr. Paley a photograph. The governor directly he saw it gave utterance to an exclamation. "Doctor! You are dreaming."

"I assure you I am not. Mr. Dodsworth, allow me to hand you a print from the first exposure. Mr. Murray, allow me to hand you one. Mr. Dodsworth, you perceive that the laugh is now upon your side."

The photograph which the doctor had handed round was not the photograph of a man at all, but of a woman. She was costumed in ordinary feminine attire. She wore no covering on her head. She was seated squarely on the chair on which prisoners were wont to sit when enjoying the luxury of having their likenesses taken at their country's expense. She was looking straight at the camera. And in the eyes there was a certain defiance, and upon her face a look of stern, resolute determination, which is not in general, to be noted upon the

countenances of those triumphs of the photographer's art with which we adorn our albums.

"Honestly, doctor," inquired the governor, "aren't you having a little joke at our expense? Or perhaps you have made a slight mistake in giving us one print for another. Are you aware that the portrait you have given us is not the portrait of a man at all, but of a woman?"

"I am aware of it, and of a woman who, to my eye, has the light of a great purpose in her face. There can be no doubt that that woman was sitting in George Solly's chair."

"And where is George Solly then?"

"That I cannot tell you. But, as Mr. Dodsworth remarked the other day — and I shall have to make my apologies to Mr. Dodsworth — it is a well-authenticated fact that the camera cannot lie. On this occasion it has seen something which was concealed from our less sensitive vision."

Mr. Paley laid down the photograph with that acid yet courteous smile for which the governor was famous.

"And where is the result of the second exposure? Is the woman still sitting in George Solly's seat?"

"No, she has left it, and this time, as you see, we have at least George Solly's face. Here is the result of the second exposure."

THE DOCTOR handed round another photograph. In this the man Solly was seated in the usual attitude, holding out the slate, and the woman was kneeling before him. Her profile was towards the camera, and she had just rubbed out the name upon the slate. At any rate, the slate was blank.

"Isn't that a remarkable photograph?" asked the doctor. "I mean a remarkable photograph from any and every point of view? Just look at the expression on the woman's face, and at the suggestion of complete unconsciousness on the face of the man. She looks as though she could, and would, do anything. He seems to be wholly innocent, even of the knowledge of her presence there."

"This photograph is, in some respects, not unlike one of Mr. Dodsworth's."

"Which makes the thing the more remarkable. But I want you particularly to observe that the slate which Solly holds is a blank. Now, I ask all of you, whether at any moment during the time I was exposing the plates that slate was blank."

"Certainly not," declared Chief Warden Murray.

The others, by their silence, acquiesced in Mr. Murray's declaration.

"If I could trust my eyes, during the whole time I was exposing the plates, the words 'George Solly' were there, ostentatiously there, upon that slate. You see that in that print the slate is blank. Now look at this — this is the result of the third exposure!"

In the fresh photograph which the doctor produced a curious change had taken place. The blank upon the slate was occupied; a name was written on it from corner to corner. It seemed that it had just been written by the woman, because the handwriting was feminine; and with her face towards the camera, still kneeling on the ground before the man George Solly, she pointed at it with a sort of defiant rage, as though she gloried in the fact of having written it, and dared them to deny the suggestion it conveyed.

"Now, what do you think of that?" cried Dr. Livermore. "You will remember that these exposures followed each other at intervals of perhaps a couple of minutes. Just now the slate was blank, now the blank is filled. The name 'George Solly' remained upon the slate throughout the several exposures, so far as we could see. But 'George Solly' is not the name with which the woman, during the couple of minutes which intervened between the two exposures, has filled the blank."

Mr. Paley was peering through his spectacles at the name which, in the photograph, appeared upon the slate. "It is certainly not 'George Solly'. It

looks like 'Evan' — 'Evan . . . ' "

"It's 'Evan Bradell.' The thing's as clear as day."

"Evan Bradell — so it is. Really, doctor, this is, in its way remarkable."

"But I venture to say that the most remarkable part is still to follow. We had, first of all, the woman sitting on the chair, on which, if we can trust the evidence of our senses throughout, no one but George Solly sat. Then we had the woman, having rubbed out the name upon the slate, George Solly now upon the chair. Then we had the woman, having substituted the one name for the other, George Solly still upon the chair. And now, in this fourth exposure, you will see that not only has the woman gone, but George Solly has vanished too, and in George Solly's chair is seated — another man! Here it is, look for yourselves."

IT WAS AS the doctor said. In the fourth photograph the woman had disappeared. There was the familiar chair, but the individual who was seated on it bore not the least resemblance to Solly. To begin with, this individual, with the exception of the hat — he was hatless — was clad in commonplace civilian costume, decorous frock-coat, and the rest of it. But it was not a question of difference of clothing; he was altogether a bigger and an older man than

Solly. And he dandled on his knee, with an air of curious discomfiture, the slate on which was inscribed, in a clear, feminine hand, the name "Evan Bradell."

While his hearers continued to examine the result of the fourth exposure the doctor delivered himself of a few observations.

"While I do not wish to suggest that we are in the presence of a manifestation from the supernatural, I do insist that we are, at any rate so far, in the presence of a mystery. I doubt if any photographer ever before discovered that, while he supposed himself to having been photographing Mr. Brown, he had, in reality, been photographing Miss Smith. I want you to note one or two points which strike me about the affair, and which may lead to a possible solution. First of all, there is the presence of the woman. In Mr. Dodsworth's original plate it requires no strong effort of the imagination to suppose that the veiled figure at the back of the chair is that of a woman. In Mr. Dodsworth's subsequent three plates the woman is certain. In my first three plates she is, if possible, more certain still. And just observe that Mr. Dodsworth's woman and my woman are identical; she has changed her dress, but the woman is the same. Possibly, Mr. Paley, you will be able to offer us an ex-

planation of how it is that Mr. Dodsworth and I should both of us been photographing a woman whom neither of us has ever seen."

Mr. Paley leaned back in his chair. He looked up at the ceiling. He pressed the tips of his fingers together. And he preserved that silence which is golden.

"It is to be noted that the attitude of the woman is, throughout, one of protection to the man and defiance to us — of defiance, that is, to the manipulator of the camera. She first of all, in Mr. Dodsworth's plate, tries to hide the name upon the slate. Then she actually, with her own person, conceals the man. In my first plate she confronts me boldly, as if to give me to understand that it is with her I have to reckon. Then she rubs out the name upon the slate, she writes another in its place. And, having substituted one name for the other, she seems, by a mere effort of will, to have effected an exchange of men: George Solly is gone, Evan Bradell occupies his place. She appears as Solly's guardian angel, resolute, at all hazards, to prove that she is on his side; and she seems to be making frantic efforts to express her unwavering faith in Solly's innocence, even going so far as to point out the man on whose shoulders the guilt should be properly laid."

The doctor paused, and the governor spoke.

"With regard to Dr. Livermore's fanciful explanation of the somewhat peculiar circumstances connected with these photographs — and the doctor will excuse me if I say that I did not think that he was capable of such flights of imagination . . ."

"Laugh away, Mr. Paley! He laughs longest who laughs last."

"Quite so, doctor, quite so! With regard to your guardian angel theory, about a woman watching over Solly, and so on, I may mention that a letter has been received in the prison, addressed to the man Solly, which comes from a woman — from a woman who is, apparently, his wife. Whoever she is, she is, if one may judge from the evidence of the letter itself, certainly a remarkable woman. And I am bound to allow that, in view of recent events, and of what we have heard from Doctor Livermore, this letter is, in a sense, a coincidence. In pursuance of the powers which are invested in me to make such use of convicted prisoners' letters as may appear to me to be justified by circumstances, I will read to you this letter which has been sent to the prison, addressed to Solly."

THE GOVERNOR read aloud the following letter. It sounded strange in his cool, clear, slight-

ly acid tones. One fancied that it had been written in a different spirit to that in which it was read.

MY OWN, DEAR, NOBLE HUSBAND,
God bless you, sweetheart! I hope you realize, my dear, that I am with you in Canterstone Jail. Not only in spirit, but actually, and in fact. I am with you in the morning when the bell rings, and you rise from your plank bed. I am with you on the treadwheel, love, and I am proud to keep step at your side. And I am with you when, in the evening, you lie down again upon your plank. I lie down on the plank beside you, and I creep into your arms as I used to do when I had you at home, and as I will do when, soon, I have you home again, my love. Do not think that I speak figuratively. I have been with you all the time that you have been in jail; I have been ever at your side, I have seen all that you have done, although I do not think, sweetheart, that you have been conscious of my presence. I have kissed you many times upon the lips, although I do not think that you have felt my kisses there. But, now that you know that I am with you, always and ever, and that I often kiss you, watch for me, dear husband. Something I am sure, will reveal to you my presence, and you will feel my kisses.

But do not think, because I am ever with you in the jail, that I am not outside as well — because indeed I am. There has come to me, during this our time of sorrow, I know not from whence or how, a dual personality. I am with you there; I shall be with you, sweetheart, when you read this letter; watch for me. I shall be leaning over your shoulder as your eyes light upon these words — and I am here, watching and working to establish the truth. And the truth is

coming out. I know whose is the guilt. It is his whom we both of us suspected from the first. And soon it shall be proved: by his own conscience and by me. So the time is drawing very near when your innocence shall be made known to the world — I would not say so if I was not sure.

God bless you, sweetheart; and God permit me to continue with you in your cell. It will not be for long. And God has been so good to us in spite of sorrows, that I have a full assurance that He will not withhold from us this further boon.

My own, dear, noble husband, I am the happiest and the proudest woman in the world, because I am able to write myself

YOUR WIFE.

"Queer letter!" observed Mr. Murray, when the governor had finished reading.

"I should say, offhand," remarked Mr. Dodsworth, "that that woman must be wrong in the head."

The doctor smoothed his shaven chin with his open palm before he spoke. "I am not so sure of that. But of one thing I am sure. I am sure I know who is the original of the woman in the photographs."

The governor glanced up from the letter which he still held in his hand. "Who is it?"

"The woman who wrote that letter — George Solly's wife."

The governor appeared to consider the matter for a moment. "That is a point that can be very easily decided. Murray, go fetch George Solly here."

THE CHIEF WARDER departed. When, in the course of a few minutes, he returned with the object of his quest, it was seen that George Solly was a young man, of perhaps six- or seven-and-twenty years of age. The prison costume which he wore was not a thing of beauty, but its ugliness was not sufficient to conceal the fact that he was a man of gentle breeding, but of modest bearing. He was fair, with clear brown eyes, and well-shaped mouth and chin, not by any means the criminal type of man, and he was a man of quiet fortitude. Despite that uniform, there was about the man a certain dignity.

Directly he had taken up the regulation stand-at-attention attitude in front of the governor's table, Mr. Paley held out to him a photograph

"Solly, whose portrait is that?"

As soon as Solly's glance fell upon the portrait, which he took from Mr. Paley, his eyes moistened and his lips twitched. "Has she sent it to me? May I have it, sir?"

"Whose portrait is it, Solly?"

But the man appeared unconscious of the governor's inquiry. He continued to gaze steadfastly upon the portrait. And he said, as if he had forgotten that anyone was present beside the portrait and himself, "How came she to be sitting on that chair? And what a strange look

she has upon her face! My darling!"

In the presence of those iron-bound officials he kissed the face which was imaged in the photograph.

"I don't think you can have heard my question, Solly. Whose portrait is that?"

"Whose? My wife's. Are you not aware of that? Has it come from her for me?"

"No." The governor held out his hand. "Give it to me." Solly shrank back a little. He seemed to hold the portrait with an intenser grasp. Then he gave it back to Mr. Paley. "That portrait is the property of the prison. I merely wished to know if you recognized the subject. Here is another portrait, Solly. Can you tell me who is the original of this?"

Solly stared, as though he could not quite make out the purport of the proceedings. He held out his hand, rather doubtfully, for the fresh photograph which the governor passed to him by way of the chief warden. But when his glance fell upon the photograph he started and he stared, and he stared and he started, as though he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"It — it can't be! At last! oh, my God, at last!"

The man's emotion was intense. But the governor paid no heed to that whatever. He repeated his inquiry in his cool,

clear, acid voice. "Are you acquainted with the original of that photograph?"

"Am I? Aren't I? Oh, Mr. Paley, have they found it out — have they discovered it was he? Am I to have my freedom? Is it known at last that I was innocent?"

"Be so good as to answer my question, Solly. Are you acquainted with the original of that photograph?"

"Certainly I am. Here is his name, written on the slate. It is Evan Bradell. From the first I suspected him. I even suspected that it was his deliberate intention to lay the onus of his guilt on me! God knows why; I never did him harm. Is he in custody upon another charge? Or how comes it, if he is in custody for the crime of which they found me guilty — guilty! me! —that I have heard nothing of it, and that I am not set free?"

The man's tones were hot and eager. The governor's, as ever, were cool, and clear, and acid.

"Solly, give me back that photograph. That also is the property of the prison. As in the case of the other, I merely wished to know if you were acquainted with the original. I would advise you, Solly, not to buoy yourself up with any hopes that the verdict which has been pronounced against you will be revised, or that the term of imprisonment which was allotted

you will be diminished. I have heard nothing which would lead me to suppose anything of the kind. Indeed, I have heard nothing about your case, either one way or the other, since you were tried. I merely sent for you here to put to you certain formal questions — that is all."

As the words were uttered in the governor's judicial, monotonous tones the man shrank back as though he had received a blow.

"There is another matter, Solly, which I wish to mention to you. A letter has been received in the prison addressed to you. It infringes one of the prison rules, which requires that every communication intended for a prisoner should be signed in full, with Christian and proper names. Moreover, the letter is couched in language which I cannot, in some respects, call proper, nor calculated to increase your peace of mind while you are here. However, I am informed that your conduct has, so far, been satisfactory, and I am therefore disposed to waive these matters upon this occasion. But you must distinctly understand that, upon another occasion, I shall not do so. Mr. Murray, see that this man has, in the dinner-hour, the letter which has been addressed to him."

And the governor handed the chief warder George Solly's letter.

III

THEY SENT UP a report to the Commissioners. It was rather a compound document. It was drawn up by the governor, the doctor, and Mr. Dodsworth in concert, with here and there a word or two from Mr. Mnurray, while in a sort of postscript Warder Slater was brought in. It narrated at some length, and with a considerable amount of circumlocution — in accordance with official traditions — the story of the photographs. The negatives went with the report. They were submitted to the impartial judgment of the Commissioners, to take or leave just as they pleased.

Mr. Paley was particularly anxious that in the report there should not only be no suggestion of the supernatural, but that there should be a distinct disclaimer of any suggestion of the kind. On this point there was a slight difference of opinion. The doctor insisted that the things which had occurred could not have occurred without the interposition of something out of the natural. He wished to insert, in his portion of the report, a gentle hint to the effect that they might have hit — which hit would tend to the advancement of photographic science — upon a novel force. Mr. Dodsworth had, or declared that he had, no theories either one way or the other. He would

have liked the report to have contained nothing but a bald statement of facts. While Mr. Murray — however, no one paid the slightest attention on this point to Mr. Murray, because, while he had the smallest possible belief in human nature, he had the strongest belief in ghosts. As for Warder Slater — what was Warder Slater's state of mind upon the matter may be better judged from a report which he made to the governor, upon his own account, a couple of days after "the" report had been sent.

The "reports" on that particular morning numbered only one: that one was Warder Slater, and the man "reported" was George Solly. Warder and prisoner took up their positions before the cord which was drawn across the room, and on the other side of which sat the governor at his table. The warder, if small in height, was large in girth — a prodigy of stoutness. The prisoner was tall and slender. As regards physical proportions, they presented a pleasing contrast. The officer seemed, for some cause or other to be not altogether at his ease. The governor opened the inquiry.

"Well, Slater, what is it?"

"Man talking in his night-cell, sir."

"To himself? Or to whom?"

The officer fidgeted — with Batavian grace.

"It's my belief, sir, he had someone in his night-cell along with him."

"Someone with him in his night-cell?"

"Yes, sir; and it's my belief it was a woman."

"A woman?"

The governor looked at the culprit — probably becoming for the first time fully conscious that that culprit was George Solly. Just then Dr. Livermore entered the office at the back. He stood and listened. The officer explained.

"I was on night-duty last night, sir, and I was going my rounds about half-past one, when, as I entered Ward C, I heard sounds of someone talking. I found that someone was talking inside of 13 C."

George Solly's prison number was 13 C, the number being that of the cell he occupied.

"I listened outside of 13 C, and I heard two voices."

"Two voices?"

"Yes, sir, two voices — and one of them a woman's."

"A woman's?"

"Yes, sir, a woman's — I heard it most distinct. I could hear what they were saying. They were regularly carrying on. I heard Solly say, 'My own true love' I heard the woman say, 'Sweetheart' and a lot more like that."

As if suspecting the presence, somewhere, of a smile Warder Slater all at once became em-

phatic. "I'm willing to take my Bible oath I heard it!"

The governor regarded the slightly excited officer through his spectacles with that calm, passionless, official look which he was famous for. He turned to the culprit. "Solly, what have you to say?"

Solly's reply was somewhat unexpected. "What Mr. Slater says is true."

"You were talking in your night-cell to a woman?"

"I was. I was talking to my wife."

"Don't trifling, my man, with me. I suppose you mean that you were engaged in some little ventriloquial performance?"

SOLLY HESITATED. It was noticed when he spoke that in his manner there was a certain exultation—a suggestion of suppressed excitement.

"You will remember that, some days ago, I received a letter from my wife. In that letter she told me that she was always with me in the jail, and that I was to watch for her."

Solly paused. The governor made a slight gesture as of interruption; but then seemed to change his mind, and the man continued. "I did watch. It seemed to me that sometimes I felt her touch, that I heard the rustle of her garments, that I even heard her voice. But the consciousness of these things was such a faint one that I sup-

posed, my attention being so acutely strained, that I had allowed myself to be deceived by my imagination. Until last night."

Solly paused again. This time the governor made no attempt at interruption. "Last night I could not sleep. I lay, dreaming, wide awake. I was wondering where my wife was, and what she was doing, and whether she was thinking of me, as I was thinking then of her, when — I felt a touch upon my lips, and found that my wife was in my arms. I don't think that I was startled, because I had half expected that she would come to me in some such way as that. But I was very glad. We sat together on the side of the bed, and she talked to me and I to her — as Mr. Slater says, we carried on — until Mr. Slater entered."

"Yes," said Warder Slater, "when I had had enough of listening, and wondering whoever could be carrying on with Solly, I opened the door soft like, so that I might catch 'em at it, whoever it was, and I saw Solly sitting on the side of the bed, and someone — couldn't quite make out who, because I don't mind owning that I felt a bit flurried, because how anybody, let alone a woman, could have got in to Solly was more than I could understand — but I saw it was a woman was sitting by his side, and she had her arms

about his neck, and he had his arms about her waist."

"Well?"

The monosyllable came from the governor. Warder Slater had paused.

"Well, sir, I just caught a glimpse of her, and she was gone — gone like a thing of air, before I had a chance to open my mouth. I don't mind owning that I didn't quite like it, at that time of night, and all; but I says to Solly, 'Who's that you had in here along with you?' And he says, 'It was my wife.' 'I shall report you,' I says, and I went outside."

"Did you hear any more talking?"

"No, sir, I did not, although I stopped outside some time and listened. And I came back half a dozen times, and each time I listened, but I never heard a sound."

The prisoner took up the tale. "She came back once and kissed me, and whispered just one word. And after that I fell asleep, and slept until the morning."

The governor leant back in his chair. He seemed to be considering. He regarded the prisoner intently, the prisoner meeting his glance with perfect self-possession. At last he said, "That will do. Take the man away." And Warder Slater and the prisoner departed.

As they went out Dr. Livermore came forward. The gov-

ernor turned to him. "Is that you, doctor? Have you heard that edifying little story? What do you think of it? Murray, you can go."

ON THAT HINT the chief warden also went. The governor and the doctor were alone.

When they were alone the two officials dropped to a perceptible degree their official manner.

"Frankly, Paley, I don't know what to think."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in the genuineness of that story as it was told to us?"

"I repeat, I don't know what to think. You see, there are not only those photographs and the woman's letter, but there is something else besides. Paley, I've been breaking the rules."

"How?"

"I've been carrying a detective camera about with me, and I've been taking a snap-shot at that man Solly whenever I got the chance."

"You have, have you? It's just as well you didn't tell me, or I should have been down on you, my friend. Well, and what was the idea?"

"Never mind what the idea was, I'll tell you what the result is. The result is nineteen photographs, and in each of them, with the exception of two, there's the woman."

"You don't mean it!"

"I do mean it. Those photographs are my own property. I've half a mind to lay them before the Society for Psychical Research. I flatter myself that they would constitute as neat a case for inquiry as that august society has yet encountered."

"Livermore! None of that! There'll be trouble if you do!"

"I'm only jesting. I'm not likely to give myself away. But I mean to keep those photographs; I mean to write their history, and I mean to leave them to my — heirs, and a ghost story to the ages. Seriously, Paley! It's nonsense to suppose that I could have photographed a woman — seventeen times — if she hadn't been there to photograph. She must have been visible to the camera if she was invisible to me. And from being visible to the camera, to being visible, and even audible and tangible, to Solly, and even Slater, it's but one step further. And that's why I say, referring to the story which Solly and Slater have just now told, that I don't know what to think; and candidly, I tell you again, I don't."

"I tell you what I mean to do; I mean to have that man transferred."

"That's one way out of it, certainly — transfer the solution of the ghost story on to someone else's shoulders. Have you heard anything about the report — our report I mean?"

"Yes. This morning. Har-

dinge's coming down tomorrow."

"Hardinge! Nice sort of man to whom to entrust a case like that! Might as well expect an elephant to dance lightly upon egg-shell chinal Blundering bull!"

MAJOR HARDINGE, the gentleman thus disrespectfully alluded to, was no less a personage than one of the inspectors of Her Majesty's prisons. As such he was a personage who, as is well known, ought to have been regarded by all properly constituted official minds with awe and respect — to speak of nothing else. On the morrow he appeared. Having scampered round the prison in his usual twenty-mile-an-hour fashion, he attacked the subject in hand in that tumultuous, hearty way he had.

"Paley, what's all this stuff and nonsense about those photographs? I'm surprised at you; 'pon my word, I am."

"May I inquire, Major Hardinge, why?"

The governor was the official to the finger-tips again.

"Send up a cock-and-bull story like that to headquarters! What do you think that we're likely to make out of it? A ghost story! There can't be the slightest doubt in the world, Paley, that somebody's been playing tricks with you — that's the general opinion at the office."

"May I ask, Major Hardinge,

if I am supposed to be the person who has been playing tricks on Mr. Paley?"

The inquiry came from Dr. Livermore.

"I'm not here to inquire who is, or who isn't. In fact, I'm not here to make any inquiry at all — the case, upon the face of it, is too trivial for inquiry. We've decided to squash it. But since I am here I may as well see this man — eh — what's his name? Solly! — just so! It appears that there are some peculiar circumstances in the case of this man — eh? — Solly. I shouldn't be surprised if you've got the wrong man here after all."

"The wrong man, major! How do you mean?"

"Those wise heads at the Quarter Sessions have made a mistake — one more example of the immaculate perfection of the system of trial by jury. Mind, I don't say that this is so. I say that it seems possible that it is so. The circumstances, as they exist at present — and which are not to be disclosed to the man Solly" — the major glared, first at the governor, then at the doctor; these three were closeted together — "are as follows. The other day a man walked into the Yard and gave himself up for embezzlement — the day before yesterday it was. When they began to inquire into the matter, it turned out that the thing of which he accused himself had taken place down

here — at Bedingfield, over the way there — and was the very thing for which the man Solly had been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to two years' hard labor."

"What is the name of the man who gave himself up?"

The major scratched his head. "A nasty name. I know it struck me directly I heard it as being a nasty name. The sort of name you'd rather be hung than have. Let me see — I've got it here." The major took out a bulky pocket-book, and out of the pocketbook a paper. "Here it is — Evan Bradell — that's the fellow's name. I've known men to commit suicide for less things than having to own a name like that."

The doctor took something from his pocket. It was a photograph. "Do you see the name which is written upon the slate which that man holds?"

"Eh?"

"Do you see, major, the name which is on that slate?"

The major took up the photograph. He peered closely at it.

"Evan — Evan Bradell, isn't it? Is this the man?"

"That, major, you should know better than I. You may have seen him, I haven't. But that appears to be his name — of which fact I was unaware until you mentioned it. If that is a likeness of the man Bradell, I think, major, that even you

will allow that the thing is curious, because that happens to be a print from one of the negatives which we sent to the Commissioners, and which was taken from the man George Solly."

THE MAJOR GLARED.

"You're at that cock-and-bull story again; in this age of enlightenment, and you a medical man, sir, I'm surprised at you, I really am! I don't want to discuss the matter; the Office is willing to consider the incident as closed, and I may say that I'm instructed not to discuss the matter. A pretty thing it would be if it got about in the papers! 'Ghost at Canterstone Jail!' Upon my word! There'd be a scandal! I shouldn't be surprised if the Commissioners felt themselves impelled to institute changes; changes, sir! To — to — to return to this man Solly, and the man, eh, what's his name? Bradell! It — it appears that this man Bradell tells a cock-and-bull story . . ."

"Another cock-and-bull story, Major?"

"Yes, sir, another cock-and-bull story; there are always plenty of them in the air, as you will learn for yourself when you reach my age. As I was saying when I was interrupted, it appears that this man Bradell tells a cock-and-bull story about being haunted, and even persecuted by this man Solly's wife, in

dreams, and that sort of rubbish, until she has driven him to remorse, and that kind of thing. In fact, there seems every probability that the man will be found to be a lunatic."

"I should like to bet two to one he isn't."

The major glowered at the doctor as though he could scarcely believe his ears. "Bet, sir! bet, sir! Do I understand you to say that you offer to bet, sir? You appear to have extraordinary notions of the proper method of conducting an official inquiry, sir! In spite of your sporting offer, sir, perhaps you will allow me to repeat — although I have no desire to bet, sir — that I have a strong reason to believe that the man will be found to be a lunatic; and I base that statement to a great extent upon the grounds that, in my opinion, every man who tells a cock-and-bull story, and persists in it in spite of common sense, is, upon the face of it, a lunatic."

The doctor, deeming discretion to be the better part of valor, contented himself with bowing. So the major was free to air himself in another direction.

"But although, as I say, it is my opinion that the man will be found to be a lunatic, and the whole affair fall through, still, as I am here, I may as well see this man Solly, and put to him a question or two."

Solly was seen by the major.

The major asked him if his name was Solly, what his age was, if he was married, if he had any children, what he had been charged with, where he had been charged, and such-like questions, and finally he asked him if he had any complaint to make of the treatment he had received in the jail. Solly replied that he had none. Then the major drew himself up in a manner which seemed intended to impress the beholders with the fact of what a very remarkable man he was. He threw his frock-coat open, and he thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat.

"There is another question which I wish to ask you, Solly. Have you ever been photographed?"

"Do you mean in prison?"

"No — I am aware that you have been photographed in prison." The major glinted at the doctor out of the corner of his eyes. "I mean outside — before you came to prison?"

"Certainly — several times."

"You will understand, Solly, that you are in no way bound to answer the questions which I am putting to you now. I am only asking them for my own private satisfaction. But have you any objection to tell me whether any difficulty has been experienced in taking your photograph?"

"Difficulty? In what way?"

"In any way. Have the pho-

tographs which have been taken of you been satisfactory?"

Solly smiled, a little faintly. "Perfectly; indeed, I have understood that I am rather a good subject than otherwise. May I ask why you inquire?"

"I ask because the photographs which have been taken of you in prison have not been satisfactory. That will do; you can take the man away. I am glad that he has no complaint to make."

WHEN SOLLY had departed the major turned to the doctor. "I believe, Dr. Livermore, that you are an amateur photographer; of course, the fact of your being a medical man explains that you are."

"I am. But my being an amateur has nothing to do with these particular photographs. I have no hesitation in saying that, regarded merely as photographs, they are first-rate."

"In your opinion, doubtless." The major's tone was dry. He rose. "I mean nothing offensive to Dr. Livermore, but the Commissioners object to experiments being made in Her Majesty's prisons. In future you will please, Paley, not to allow them. The treatment to which that man Solly has been subjected can scarcely be justified. Who is the man Dodsworth, who is responsible for some of the photographs? Have you employed him before?"

"Mr. Dodsworth is a highly respectable photographer in the town. He has been frequently employed in the prison, and has always given satisfaction."

"Don't employ him again. Employ somebody else next time. If you can't find anyone the Commissioners will send you a man from town. I'm going, Paley. I think that's all I have to say."

And Major Hardinge shook the dust of Canterstone Jail from his feet.

THAT NIGHT IN Canterstone Jail something rather curious occurred. It was very late. Not only had the prisoners retired — they retired at eight, as they should have done in the days when they were young! — but the warders had retired too — they retired at ten — and even the governor, who, of course, retired when he pleased, but who observed virtuous hours as a rule, had sought his pillows with the rest. It was the rule at Canterstone, when the prisoners withdrew to their plank couches, for the day-warders to withdraw from the actual precincts of the jail; they occupied a row of cottages on the other side of the wall. The night-warders came on duty. In list slippers they promenaded, with more or less frequency, the wards, in the silent watches of the night.

At the absolutely sepulchral

hour of two A.M., on the occasion which has been referred to, a figure might have been observed stealing along the path which ran outside one of the wards in the direction of the governor's house. The figure was not that of an escaped felon — not at all. The figure was the figure of a warder. He appeared to be in considerable haste, for he had not stayed to remove the list slippers from his feet, and he moved along as fast as he possibly could — he was great in girth — with his lantern in his hand. The governor's house was in the very center of the prison. When this warder reached it he rang the bell; and he not only rang it, but he gave it a mighty tug. The bell, like a surgeon's, was a night bell. It was hung in the apartment which was occupied, not only by Mr. Paley, but by Mrs. Paley, too. So that when the bell was tugged like that the lady could scarcely fail to hear it, if the gentleman deemed it wiser to sleep on. Warder Slater — for the warder was Warder Slater — had no necessity to give a second tug. In a remarkably short space of time a window was opened overhead and a head came out. The head was the governor's.

"Who's there?"

"Warder Slater, sir."

"What's the matter?"

"There's a ghost in Ward C, sir."

"A ghost?"

"Yes, sir — there's that woman in Solly's cell again, sir."

It is no slight thing for the warden of a prison to rouse the governor in the middle of the night, or what is the same thing, at so early an hour as two A.M. It is well understood that there are occasions on which the governor must be roused. But the Commissioners have not distinctly stated whether the occasion of the presence of a ghost is one of them. Perhaps the omission has occurred because a ghost is so rare a visitor — even in prison, which sees strange visitors — that the thing seemed scarcely worth providing against. Whatever may have been the governor's private opinion on the matter, he contented himself with saying, before he closed the window, "Wait! — I'm coming!"

And he did come, slipping into some of his clothes with a degree of despatch which would have done credit to the schoolboy who delays his rising from bed until he hears the breakfast bell. "Some more nonsense, Slater?"

That was the governor's drily-uttered observation as he joined the warder. "Well, sir, you will see for yourself, sir, when we get there!"

GOVERNOR AND warder started off together towards Ward C. As they moved over

the pebbly path the warder, whose state of mind did not seem to be a state of perfect ease, endeavored to explain.

"I've been in that ward a dozen times tonight, sir. I thought more than once that I heard the sound of someone whispering, but I wasn't quite sure until I went in just now sir. Directly I went in this last time I knew that there was something up. I stood outside of Number Thirteen's door, and sure enough I heard that woman talking to Solly, and carrying on with him, just as she was the other night, sir. I didn't hardly know what to do, sir, because, I says to myself, if I report the man the governor won't believe me. Then I makes up my mind to come and tell you, sir, so that you could come and see for yourself. I don't know if we shall find her there now, sir: she may have gone. But that she was there a couple of minutes ago, when I came to fetch you, I'll take my Bible oath!"

"That'll do. We shall see if she's there when we get there."

The governor's tone was not reassuring — but then it seldom was. His official tone was not reassuring. Warder Slater heartily hoped that she would be there. He began to be conscious that it was quite within the range of possibility that the governor might be disposed to make an example of a warder

who routed him out of bed in the middle of the night to see a ghost which was neither to be seen nor heard.

They entered the prison, which was itself a ghostly place to enter. They went in by the round-house, and there it was not so bad; but when they began to mount the cold, worn, stone steps which wound up between the massive whitewashed walls, the darkness rendered still more visible by the lantern in the warder's hand, one began to realize that, after all, there might be "visions about."

Canterstone Jail was an old-fashioned jail, built in the good old-fashioned days when stone walls, six feet thick, were considered a *sine qua non* in jails. In the broad noonday glare the wards in which the night-cells were dimly lighted. Entering them at two A.M. one received an object-lesson in "Egyptian darkness." One had but to stretch out one's arms to more than span the flagstoned passage. And when one realized that on one side there was a six-foot wall, and on the other — surrounded, it is true, by other six-foot walls, but none the further off for that — lay the representatives of every shade of crime, one did not need to have an abnormal imagination to begin to comprehend that it is not always the part of wisdom to laugh at the tales which are told of churchyards yawn-

ing, and of the graves which yield their dead.

At Canterstone there were, in each ward, four floors: the ground floor, the first floor, the second floor, and the third floor. Solly's sleeping-place was on the third floor, that farthest from the ground and nearest to the sky. The governor and warder laid his hand on Mr. Paley's arm. "Do you hear, sir? She's with him still!"

THERE WAS A note of exultation in the officer's voice which seemed, all things considered, to be a little out of place. The governor made no reply. He stood and listened. The general stillness rendered any sound there might be still more audible. That there was a sound there could be no doubt. The governor listened, so as to be quite clear in his own mind as to what the sound was. It was the sound of voices. Unless his sense of hearing played him false the speakers were two.

"Which is Solly's cell?"

The governor put the question in a whisper. In a whisper the officer replied, "Number thirteen — right the other end, sir. That's where they're talking — he and the woman. Come along with me sir, and we shall catch them at it."

The governor checked the impulsive Slater. "Darken your lantern. You have your keys? When we reach the door keep

perfectly still until I give you the order. Then unlock the door and throw the light of your lantern into Solly's cell."

Warder Slater darkened his lantern. In the pitchy blackness the governor and the warder stole along the corridor. They were guided by the sense of sound. Guided by that sense, they paused at the spot where the talking seemed to be most audible.

"Is this the cell?"

The governor's voice seemed scarcely to penetrate the darkness. The warder's "Yes" was but an echo. The silence was profound, except on the other side the door on the outer side of which they two were standing.

There was someone talking in the cell. The speakers seemed to be two. An attentive ear could catch the words which were being spoken.

"I could not rest unless you knew, and so I came to tell you, so that there might be an end to your suspense, and that you might not need to wait until the morning for the news."

The speaker was a woman — of a surety, the speaker was a woman!

"My darling!" This time the speaker unmistakably was Solly.

Then there ensued what Warder Slater had described as "carrying-ons". The governor's sensations must have been of a somewhat speckled variety as he played the part of eaves-

dropper to proceedings such as those, because there could be not the slightest possible shadow of doubt that within that cell there were "carryings-on". There came to them who listened the sound of a woman's voice, uttering, in tones so tender they fell like sweet music on the ear, "loves", and "sweet-hearts", and "my own, own darlings!" and such-like vanities. And to her replied a man, in tones as tender if not as musical, who did his best to give the woman a fair exchange for her conversational sweetmeats of affection. But when it came to kissing, audible, in its prolonged ecstasy, on the outer side of that thick oaken door, the governor seemed to think that it was time that something should be done.

AND, ALMOST simultaneously, the key was turned in the well-oiled lock. The door was thrown wide open, and Warder Slater's lantern gleamed into the cell. Then there was silence, both in the cell and out of it; and the governor stood within the open doorway, with the warder just in front of him, a little to one side, so as not to obstruct the governor's view, and the lantern in his hand. And both of these officials stared — stared hard! For in front of them stood Solly in considerable undress, and at his side . . .

It is probably owing to the

governor's proverbial official caution that he could never be induced to say what was at Solly's side — to say positively, that is. It seemed to him it was a woman. Not such a woman as we meet in daily life, but, as it were, the shadow of a woman. It seemed to the governor that she was attired in *robe de unit*. Solly held her by the hand. The governor thought he saw so much, but before he had a chance of seeing more she fled, or vanished into air. His eyes never ceased to gaze at Solly's side, and there was nothing there.

When there could be no doubt that the tangible presence of the something which had been standing there had gone, the governor's voice rang out sharp and clear, "Solly, who was that you were talking to?"

"It was my wife."

"Your wife?" The governor stared. There was a peculiar ring in his voice, which probably no prisoner had ever heard in it before. "I will have you punished in the morning."

The prisoner smiled. In his voice there was also a ring, but it was a ring of a different kind.

"No, Mr. Paley, you will not, because in the morning I shall be free." Solly paused, as if to give the governor an opportunity of speaking; but the opportunity was not taken. So he went on, "My wife has come to bring me good news."

He turned; he held out his arms as if to take someone within them, but they could see no one there to take. And he said, "Goodbye until the morning, wife!"

He advanced his face as if to kiss someone, and there was the sound of a kiss, but they could see no one who could have kissed him. Then he turned again to Mr. Paley, crying, in a voice which was half tears, half laughter, "It's all come out at last! Bradell's confessed! The Home Secretary has procured a free pardon! You will have it in the morning. My wife has been to tell me so."

It is certain that the governor could not have had much sleep that night. Warden Slater

roused him at two A.M.; and if, when he returned to bed again, he was inclined to slumber, he had not much opportunity for the indulgence of his inclination. At an unusually early hour he was aroused again. A special messenger had arrived from town, bringing with him a communication from the Home Secretary for the governor of Canterstone Jail. The communication took the form of that bitter wrong of which the system of English jurisprudence still is guilty. The Home Secretary informed the governor of Canterstone Jail that Her Majesty the Queen had been graciously pleased to grant a free pardon to the prisoner George Solly, for what he had never done.

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The Distortion Out Of Space

by Francis Flagg

GEORGE HENRY WEISS, who wrote under the name of Francis Flagg, first appeared in the November issue of AMAZING STORIES with an unusual short story entitled *The Machine Man of Ardathia*; he was among the relatively few science fiction authors whose first-published story was chosen for a cover illustration, although neither the title of the story nor the author's name was listed thereon. One of the advantages of the writing career is that an author can choose his ancestors, literally speaking; and in those early years of magazine fiction most new writers chose either Jules Verne, whose main interest was the marvels of scientific discovery and adventure, or H. G. Wells, whose scientific speculations were secondary to consideration of the sociological and human consequences of this or that projection of "scientific" speculation. (In fact, Wells' "science" was often flim-flam. As Basil Davenport puts it in his *Inquiry Into Science Fiction* . . . Wells was willing to make things easy for himself, and perhaps for his reader, by postulating an invention that would get his characters where he wanted them to go. It didn't matter whether or not there was any real scientific basis for it, provided he could make it sound possible.") Francis Flagg was a Wellsian; his score as a "scientific" prophet is zero — but he wasn't interested in being one. And it is precisely because he was more interested in human beings and social forces that his better stories — those not written to accord with "pulp" action formulae — bear re-reading today.

BACK OF Bear Mountain the meteor fell that night. Jim Blake and I saw it falling through the sky. As large as a small balloon it was and trailed a fiery tail. We knew it struck within a few miles of our camp, and later we saw the glare of a fire dully lighting the heavens. Timber is sparse on the farther slope of Bear Mountain, and what little there is of it is stunted and grows in patches, with wide intervals of barren and rocky ground. The fire did not spread to any extent and soon burned itself out.

Seated by our campfire we talked of meteoroids, those casual visitants from outer space which are usually small and consumed by heat on entering Earth's atmosphere. Jim spoke of the huge one that had fallen in northern Arizona before the coming of the white man; and of another, more recent, which fell in Siberia.

"Fortunately," he said, "meteors do little damage; but if a large one were to strike a densely populated area, I shudder to think of the destruction to life and property. Ancient cities may have been blotted out in some such catastrophe. I don't believe that this one we just saw fell anywhere near Simpson's ranch."

"No," I said, "it hit too far north. Had it landed in the valley we couldn't have seen the reflection of the fire it started.

We're lucky it struck no handier to us."

The next morning, full of curiosity, we climbed to the crest of the mountain, a distance of perhaps two miles. Bear Mountain is really a distinctive hog's-back of some height, with more rugged and higher mountain peaks around and beyond it. No timber grows on the summit, which, save for tufts of bear-grass and yucca, is rocky and bare. Looking down the farther side from the eminence attained, we saw that an area of hillside was blasted and still smoking. The meteor, however, had buried itself out of sight in earth and rock, leaving a deep crater some yards in extent.

About three miles away, in the small valley below, lay Henry Simpson's ranch, seemingly undamaged. Henry was a licensed guide, and when he went into the mountains after deer, we made his place our headquarters. Henry was not visible as we approached, nor his wife; and a certain uneasiness hastened our steps when we perceived that a portion of the house-roof — the house was built of adobe two stories high and had a slightly pitched roof made of rafters across which corrugated iron strips were nailed — was twisted and rent.

"Good heavens!" said Jim; "I hope a fragment of that meteor-

ite hasn't done any damage here."

Leaving the burros to shift for themselves, we rushed into the house. "Hey, Henry!" I shouted. "Henry! Henry!"

NEVER SHALL I forget the sight of Henry Simpson's face as he came tottering down the broad stairs. Though it was eight o'clock in the morning, he still wore pajamas. His gray hair was tousled, his eyes staring.

"Am I mad, dreaming?" he cried hoarsely.

He was a big man, all of six feet tall, not the ordinary mountaineer, and though over sixty years of age, possessed of great physical strength. But now his shoulders sagged, he shook as if with palsy.

"For heaven's sake, what's the matter?" demanded Jim. "Where's your wife?"

Henry Simpson straightened himself with an effort. "Give me a drink." Then he said strangely, "I'm in my right mind — of course I must be in my right mind — but how can that thing upstairs be possible?"

"What thing? What do you mean?"

"I don't know. I was sleeping soundly when the bright light wakened me. That was last night, hours and hours ago. Something crashed into the house."

"A piece of the meteorite,"

said Jim, looking quickly at me. "Meteorite?"

"One fell last night on Bear Mountain. We saw it fall."

Henry Simpson lifted a gray face. "It may have been that."

"You wakened, you say?"

"Yes, with a cry of fear. I thought the place had been struck by lightning. 'Lydia!' I screamed, thinking of my wife. But Lydia never answered. The bright light had blinded me. At first I could see nothing. Then my vision cleared. Still I could see nothing — though the room wasn't dark."

"What!"

"Nothing, I tell you. No room, no walls, no furniture; only whichever way I looked, emptiness. I had leapt from bed in my first waking moments and couldn't find it again. I walked and walked, I tell you, and ran and ran; but the bed had disappeared, the room had disappeared. It was like a nightmare. I tried to wake up. I was on my hands and knees, crawling, when someone shouted my name. I crawled toward the sound of that voice, and suddenly I was in the hallway above, outside my room door. I dared not look back. I was afraid, I tell you, afraid. I came down the steps."

He paused, wavered. We caught him and eased his body down on a sofa.

"For God's sake," he whispered, "go find my wife."

Jim said soothingly, "There, there, sir, your wife is all right." He motioned me imperatively with his hand. "Go out to our cabin, Bill, and bring me my bag."

I DID AS he bade. Jim was a practicing physician and never traveled without his kit. He dissolved a morphine tablet, filled a hypodermic, and shot its contents into Simpson's arm. In a few minutes, the old man sighed, relaxed, and fell into heavy slumber.

"Look," said Jim, pointing.

The soles of Simpson's feet were bruised, bleeding, the pajamas shredded at the knees, the knees lacerated.

"He didn't dream it," muttered Jim at length. "He's been walking and crawling, all right."

We stared at each other. "But good Lord, man!" I exclaimed.

"I know," said Jim. He straightened up. "There's something strange here. I'm going upstairs. Are you coming?"

Together we mounted to the hall above. I didn't know what we expected to find. I remembered wondering if Simpson had done away with his wife and was trying to act crazy. Then I recollect that both Jim and I had observed the damage to the roof. Something had struck the house. Perhaps that something had killed Mrs. Simpson. She was an energetic woman, a few years younger than her

husband, and not the sort to be lying quietly abed at such an hour.

Filled with misgivings, we reached the landing above and stared down the corridor. The corridor was well lighted by means of a large window at its extreme end. Two rooms opened off this corridor, one on each side. The doors to both were ajar.

The first room into which we glanced was a kind of writing-room and library. I have said that Simpson was no ordinary mountaineer. As a matter of fact, he was a man who read widely and kept abreast of the better publications in current literature.

The second room was the bedchamber. Its prosaic door — made of smoothed planks — swung outward. It swung toward us, half open, and in the narrow corridor we had to draw it still further open to pass. Then . . .

"My God!" said Jim.

Rooted to the floor, we both stared. Never shall I forget the sheer astonishment of that moment. For beyond the door, where a bedroom should have been there was . . .

"Oh, it's impossible!" I muttered.

I LOOKED away. Yes, I was in a narrow corridor, a house. Then I glanced back and the effect was that of gazing into

the emptiness of illimitable space. My trembling fingers gripped Jim's arm. I am not easily terrified. Men of my calling — aviation — have to possess steady nerves. Yet there was something so strange, so weird about the sight that I confess to a wave of fear. The space stretched away on all sides beyond that door, as space stretches away from one who, lying on his back on a clear day, stares at the sky. But this space was not bright with sunlight. It was a gloomy space, gray, intimidating; a space in which no stars or moon or sun were discernible. And it was a space that had — aside from its gloom — a quality of indirectness . . .

"Jim," I whispered hoarsely, "do you see it too?"

"Yes, Bill, yes."

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know. An optical illusion, perhaps. Something has upset the perspective in that room."

"Upset?"

"I'm trying to think."

He brooded a moment. Though a practicing physician, Jim is interested in physics and higher mathematics. His papers on the relativity theory have appeared in many scientific journals.

"Space," he said, "has no existence aside from matter. You know that. Nor aside from time." He gestured quickly.

"There's Einstein's concept of matter being a kink in space, of a universe at once finite and yet infinite. It's all abstruse and hard to grasp." He shook his head. "But in outer space, far beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes, things may not function exactly as they do on Earth. Laws may vary, phenomena the direct opposite of what we are accustomed to may exist."

His voice sank. I stared at him, fascinated.

"And that meteoroid from God knows where!" He paused a moment. "I am positive that this phenomenon we witness is connected with it. Something came to Earth in that meteor and has lodged in this room, something possessing alien properties, that is able to distort, warp . . ." His voice died away.

I stared fearfully through the open door. "Good heavens," I said, "what can it be? What would have the power to create such an illusion?"

"If it is an illusion," muttered Jim. "Perhaps it is no more an illusion than the environment in which we have our being and which we scarcely question. Don't forget that Simpson wandered through it for hours. Oh, it sounds fantastic, impossible, I know, and at first I believed he was raving; but now . . . now . . ." He straightened abruptly. "Mrs. Simpson is somewhere in that room, in that incredible

space, perhaps wandering about, lost, frightened. I'm going in."

I pleaded with him to wait, to reconsider. "If you go, I'll go too," I said.

He loosened my grip. "No, you must stay by the door to guide me with your voice."

DESPITE MY further protestations, he stepped through the doorway. In doing so it seemed that he must fall into an eternity of nothing.

"Jim!" I called fearfully. He glanced back, but whether he heard my voice I could not say. Afterward he said he hadn't.

It was weird to watch him walking — a lone figure in the midst of infinity. I tell you, it was the weirdest and most incredible sight the eye of man has ever seen. *I must be asleep, dreaming*, I thought: *this can't be real*.

I had to glance away, to assure myself by a sight of the hall that I was actually awake. The room at most was only thirty feet from door to wall; yet Jim went on and on, down an everlasting vista of gray distance, until his figure began to shorten, dwindle. Again I screamed, "Jim! Jim! Come back, Jim!" But in the very moment of my screaming, his figure flickered, went out, and in all the vast lonely reaches of that gloomy void, nowhere was he to be seen — nowhere!

I wonder if anyone can imagine a tithe of the emotions which swept over me at that moment. I crouched by the doorway to that incredible room, a prey to the most horrible fears and surmises. Anon I called out, "Jim! Jim!" but no voice replied, no familiar figure loomed on my sight.

The sun was high overhead when I went heavily down the stairs and out into the open. Simpson was still sleeping on the couch, the sleep of exhaustion. I remembered that he had spoken of hearing our voices calling him as he wandered through gray space, and it came over me as ominous and suggestive of disaster that my voice had, apparently, never reached Jim's ears, that no sound had come to my own ears out of the weird depths.

After the long hours of watching in the narrow corridor, of staring into alien space, it was with an inexpressible feeling of relief, of having escaped something horrible and abnormal, that I greeted the sun-drenched day. The burros were standing with drooping heads in the shade of a live-oak tree. Quite methodically I relieved them of their packs; then I filled and lit my pipe, doing everything slowly, carefully, as if aware of the need for restraint, calmness. On such little things does a man's sanity often depend. And all the time I stared at the house, at

the upper portion of it where the uncanny room lay. Certain cracks showed in its walls and the roof above was twisted and torn. I asked myself, how was this thing possible? How, within the narrow confines of a single room, could the phenomenon of infinite space exist? Einstein, Eddington, Jeans — I had read their theories, and Jim might be correct, but the strangeness of it, the horror! *You're mad, Bill*, I said to myself, *mad, mad, mad!* But there were the burros, there was the house. A scarlet tanager soared by, a hawk wheeled overhead, a covey of ring-necked mountain quail scuttled through tangled brush. No, I wasn't mad, I couldn't be dreaming, and Jim — Jim was somewhere in that accursed room, that distortion out of space, lost, wandering!

IT WAS THE most courageous thing I ever did in my life — to re-enter that house, climb those stairs. I had to force myself to do it, for I was desperately afraid and my feet dragged. But Simpson's ranch was in a lonely place, the nearest town or neighbor miles distant. It would take hours to fetch help, and of what use would it be when it did arrive? Besides, Jim needed aid, now, at once.

Though every nerve and fiber of my body rebelled at the thought, I fastened the end of a rope to a nail driven in the hall

floor and stepped through the doorway. Instantly I was engulfed by endless space. It was a terrifying sensation. So far as I could see, my feet rested on nothing. Endless distance was below me as well as above. Sick and giddy, I paused and looked back, but the doorway had vanished. Only the coil of rope in my hands, and the heavy pistol in my belt, saved me from giving way to utter panic.

Slowly I paid out the rope as I advanced. At first it stretched into infinity like a sinuous serpent. Then suddenly all but a few yards of it disappeared. Fearfully I tugged at the end in my hands. It resisted the tug. The rope was still there, even if invisible to my eyes, every inch of it paid out; yet I was no nearer the confines of that room. Standing there with emptiness above, around, below me, I knew the meaning of utter desolation, of fear and loneliness. This way and that I groped, at the end of my tether. Somewhere Jim must be searching and groping too. "Jim!" I shouted; and miraculously enough, in my very ear it seemed, Jim's voice bellowed, "Bill! Bill! Is that you, Bill?"

"Yes," I almost sobbed. "Where are you, Jim?"

"I don't know. This place has me bewildered. I've been wandering around for hours. Listen, Bill; everything is out of focus

here, matter warped, light curved. Can you hear me, Bill?"

"Yes, yes. I'm here too, clinging to the end of a rope that leads to the door. If you could follow the sound of my voice . . ."

"I'm trying to do that. We must be very close to each other. Bill . . ." His voice grew faint, distant.

"Here!" I shouted, "here!"

Far off I heard his voice calling, receding.

"For God's sake, Jim, this way, this way!"

Suddenly the uncanny space appeared to shift, to eddy — I can describe what occurred in no other fashion — and for a moment in remote distance I saw Jim's figure. It was toiling up an endless hill, away from me; up, up; a black dot against an immensity of nothing. Then the dot flickered, went out, and he was gone. Sick with nightmarish horror, I sank to my knees, and even as I did so the realization of another disaster made my heart leap suffocatingly to my throat. In the excitement of trying to attract Jim's attention, I had dropped hold of the rope!

Panic leapt at me, sought to overwhelm me, but I fought it back. Keep calm, I told myself; don't move, don't lose your head; the rope must be lying at your feet. But though I felt carefully on all sides, I could

not locate it. I tried to recollect if I had moved from my original position. Probably I had taken a step or two away from it, but in what direction? Hopeless to ask. In that infernal distortion of space and matter, there was nothing by which to determine direction. Yet I did not, I could not abandon hope. The rope was my only guide to the outer world, the world of normal phenomena and life.

This way and that I searched, wildly, frantically, but to no purpose. At last I forced myself to stand quite still, closing my eyes to shut out the weird void. My brain functioned chaotically. Lost in a thirty-foot room, Jim, myself, and a woman, unable to locate one another — the thing was impossible, incredible. With trembling fingers I took out my pipe, pressed tobacco in the charred bowl and applied a match. Thank God for nicotine! My thoughts flowed more clearly. Incredible or not, here I was, neither mad nor dreaming. Some quirk of circumstance had permitted Simpson to stagger from the web of illusion, but that quirk had evidently been one in a thousand. Jim and I might go wandering through alien depths until we died of hunger and exhaustion.

I OPENED my eyes. The gray clarity of space — a clarity of subtle indirection — still hemmed me in. Somewhere

within a few feet of where I stood — as distance is computed in a three-dimensional world — Jim must be walking or standing. But this space was not three-dimensional. It was a weird dimension from outside the solar system which the mind of man could never hope to understand or grasp. And it was terrifying to reflect that within its depths Jim and I might be separated by thousands of miles and yet be cheek by jowl.

I walked on. I could not stand still forever. *God, I thought, there must be a way out of this horrible place, there must be!* Ever and anon I called Jim's name. After a while I glanced at my watch, but it had ceased to run. Every muscle in my body began to ache, and thirst was adding its tortures to those of the mind. "Jim!" I cried hoarsely, again and again, but silence pressed in on me until I felt like screaming.

Conceive of it if you can. Though I walked on matter firm enough to the feet, seemingly space stretched below as well as above. Sometimes I had the illusion of being inverted, of walking head-downward. There was an uncanny sensation of being translated from spot to spot without the need of intermediate action. *God!* I prayed inwardly, *God!* I sank to my knees, pressing my hands over my eyes. But of what use was that? Of what use was any-

thing? I staggered to my feet, fighting the deadly fear gnawing at my heart, and forced myself to walk slowly, without haste, counting the steps, one, two, three . . .

WHEN IT WAS I first noticed the shimmering radiation, I can not say. Like heat radiation it was, only more subtle, like waves of heat rising from an open furnace. I rubbed my eyes, I stared tensely. Yes, waves of energy were being diffused from some invisible source. Far off in the illimitable depths of space I saw them pulsing; but I soon perceived that I was fated — like a satellite fixed in its groove — to travel in a vast circle of which they were the center.

And perhaps in that direction lay the door!

Filled with despair, I again sank to my knees, and kneeling I thought drearily, *This is the end, there is no way out*, and calmer than I had been for hours — there is a calmness of despair, a fatalistic giving over of struggle — I raised my head and looked apathetically around.

Strange, strange; weird and strange. Could this be real, was I myself? Could an immensity of nothing lie within a thirty-foot radius, be caused by something out of space, something brought by the meteor, something able to distort, warp?

Distort, warp!

With an oath of dawning comprehension I leapt to my feet and glared at the shimmering radiation. Why couldn't I approach it? What strange and invisible force forbade? Was it because the source of this incredible space lay lurking there? Oh, I was mad, I tell you, a little insane, yet withal, possessed of a certain coolness and clarity of thought. I drew the heavy pistol from its holster. A phrase of Jim's kept running through my head: *Vibration, vibration, everything is varying rates of vibration.* Yet for a moment I hesitated. Besides myself, in this incredible space two others were lost, and what if I were to shoot either of them? Better that, I told myself, than to perish without a struggle.

I raised the pistol. The shimmering radiation was something deadly, inimical, the diffusing waves of energy were loathsome tentacles reaching out to slay.

"Damn you," I muttered, and pulled the trigger.

OF WHAT followed I possess but a kaleidoscopic and chaotic memory. The gray void seemed to breathe in and out. Alternate-
ly I saw space and room, room and space; leering at me through the interstices of this bewildering change something indescribably loathsome, something that lurked at the center of a crystal ball my shots had

perforated. Through the bullet-holes in this crystal a slow vapor oozed, and as it oozed, the creature inside of the ball struggled and writhed; and as it struggled I had the illusion of being lifted in and out, in and out; into the room, out into empty space. Then suddenly the crystal ball shivered and broke; I heard it break with a tinkling as of glass; the luminous vapor escaped in a swirl, the gray void vanished, and sick and giddy I found myself definitely encompassed by the walls of a room and within a yard of the writhing monstrosity.

As I stood with rooted feet, too dazed to move, the monstrosity reared. I saw it now in all its hideousness. A spidery thing it was, and yet not a spider. Up it reared, up, four feet in the air, its saucer-like eyes goggling out at me, its hairy paws reaching. Sick with terror, I was swept forward into the embrace of the loathsome creature. Then happened that which I can never forget till my dying day, so strange it was, so weird. Imagination, you say, the fantastic thoughts of a temporarily disordered mind. Perhaps, perhaps; but suddenly I seemed to know — know beyond a doubt — that this spider-like visitant from outer space was an intelligent, reasoning being. Those eyes — they seemed to bore into the innermost recesses of my brain, seemed to establish a spe-

cies of communication between myself and the intelligence back of them.

It was not a malignant intelligence — I realized that — but in comparison to myself something god-like, remote. And yet it was a mortal intelligence. My bullets had shattered its protective covering, had reached to its vulnerable body, and as it held me to itself, it was in the very throes of dissolution. All this I sensed, all this it told me; not through language, but through some subtle process of picture transference which it is hopeless for me to attempt to explain. I seemed to see a gray, weird place where delicate traceries were spun and silver devices shimmered and shone — the habitat of the strange visitant from outer space. Perhaps the receiving-cells of my brain were not developed enough to receive all the impressions it tried to convey.

Nothing was clear, distinct, nothing definite. I had the agonizing consciousness that much was slipping through my brain, uncorrelated, unregistered. But a meteoroid was hurtling through the blackness of space — and I saw that meteoroid. I saw it falling to Earth. I saw a portion of it swing clear, crash through the roof of Simpson's house and lodge in the bed-

room. And I saw the strange visitant from outside our universe utilize the incredible power he possessed to distort space, iron out the kinks of matter in it, veil himself in immensity while studying his alien surroundings.

And then all his expiring emotions seemed to rush over me in a flood and I felt — *felt* — what he was thinking. He had made a journey from one star system to another, he had landed safely on Earth, a trillion, trillion light-years distant, but never would he return to his own planet to tell of his success — never, never! All this I seemed to understand, to grasp, in a split second or so, his loneliness and pain, his terrible nostalgia; then the hairy paws relaxed their grip, the hideous body collapsed in on itself, and as I stared at it sprawling on the floor, I was suddenly conscious of Mrs. Simpson crouching, unharmed, in one corner of the room, of Jim standing beside me, clutching my arm.

"Bill," he said hoarsely, "are you hurt?" And then in a whisper, "What is it? What is it?"

"I don't know," I returned chokingly, "I don't know. But whatever it is, it is dead now — the Distortion out of Space."

And unaccountably I buried my face in my hands and began to weep.

Guarantee Period

by William M. Danner

William M. Danner, long-standing fantasy enthusiast, amateur publisher, collector of antique typewriters which, with a little work, he claims, are better than the newest today, model railroad enthusiast, and devotee of the highest in high fidelity (he's one of the rare specimens in his breed who love good music, too), makes his professional debut here if memory has not dealt us false. In any event, this is far, far from his first published prose or fiction as, when we first heard of him in 1945, he was producing his own amateur publication, hand-set from his own press. This little publication, STEFANTASY, still appears now and then, and, since the beginning, is devoted to snide comments on various aspects of human folly both from the editor's and various others' hands. WMD, and those of us who used to contribute to his magazine, were writing MAD type ads long before that publication was ever dreamed of.

I LIKE mountain-climbing but there aren't any mountains around here. There is nothing but those damn buttes so I climb them. Most of them are pretty tough to climb but there isn't anything when you get to the top. Usually there isn't, at least.

Usually, too, I find no traces to indicate that anyone has been there before me. Who's foolish enough to climb these little mountains when the world is full of big mountains? Who, indeed, especially in these days when it can be seen from planes

that there's nothing on top worth the climb?

The one I climbed last month is so small and unimportant that it hasn't any name, even locally. That's why I was so startled when, fifty feet or so from the top, I came upon a man lying in a crumpled heap in a little crevasse. I thought at first that he was dead but as I approached he turned his head a bit and whispered, "Water!"

I gave him a drink from my flask and asked, "Is it safe to move you? I can't get you down this slope but I can go for help."

When he was through drinking I stoppered the flask and put it away. "Don't bother," he said in a barely audible voice. "I'm all busted up inside." He coughed weakly and retched. "But thanks . . . The valve — you gotta fix the valve." He gave me one piercing glance, said, "Oh, my God!" and went limp. I knew it was no use but I picked up his wrist anyway. There was no pulse.

He'd have to be removed, of course. But I couldn't do the job alone and I decided to go on to the top before going for help. I was curious about this cryptic command about the valve, whatever that might be. I picked my way carefully to the top, avoiding the loose rubble that had been the stranger's undoing.

The top looked about the

same as the tops of all the others I had climbed. I started a systematic search, walking around the rim and gradually spiralling toward the center. The going was fairly easy, for this butte was unusually level on top, though pretty well covered with scattered boulders of all sizes. Finally, near the middle, I found what the unfortunate stranger had referred to. In a sort of cairn, open to the east, was what can be described only as an oversized tire-valve!

I don't suppose anyone ever actually pinches himself to see if he is awake but I came close to doing it then. I stooped and gently touched the thing. The faint hissing that had drawn my attention to its location suddenly increased in volume and I quickly withdrew my hand. The noise diminished somewhat but was still louder than before I touched the valve. The air was issuing from a slight crack in the valve-stem about an inch above the point where it disappeared into the ground. I had no doubt that the stranger's curiosity had caused the crack; possibly he had attempted to unscrew the cap.

AS I CLIMBED down the side of the butte my mind wasn't occupied entirely with hunting the best path so that a couple of times I almost met the fate of the stranger. I caught myself in time, though, and

made it down safely, then pushed the old Jeep to its limit in getting to the sheriff's office in town. I told him quickly of the dead man near the top of the butte.

"Jeezl!" he exclaimed. "What a hell of a place to kick the bucket! How're we supposed to get him down from there?" Then he stopped feeling sorry for himself. "We'd better get at it, I suppose. The longer we put it off in this heat the more he'll stink when we get there . . . Any idea who he was, Jim?"

"Not the slightest, Les. He's not from around here, though, I'm sure. There's no car parked at the end of the road, so he must have walked some distance."

Sheriff Floyd rounded up four of the less shiftless loafers sitting in front of the saloon and told them what had to be done. They weren't enthusiastic, and I couldn't blame them, but they got up and came with us. We all piled into the sheriff's ancient car and lit out for the butte.

"Any idea how long he's been dead, Jim?" Les asked when we had started.

I looked at my watch. "Just an hour and forty-seven minutes," I said, and immediately wished I hadn't.

"Oh, then he died after you found him. Did he say anything?"

I hesitated a moment and then decided to tell him the whole unlikely story. "Not much. He was just about gone when I found him and he asked for water. I gave him a drink and said I'd go for help to get him down. He said, 'Don't bother. I'm all busted up inside.' Then he paused a minute and said . . ."

I paused, too, until Les prompted me. "Well, he said, 'The valve — you gotta fix the valve.' Then he gave me a queer look and said, 'Oh, my God!' and that was it."

Les turned his head for a moment and looked me in the eyes. "The *valve*? What the hell does that mean?"

"I wish I could say I don't know. But, before coming back for you, I went on up to the top and hunted around, and I found it. It's a big tire-valve."

Les stopped the car and stared at me. "A *tire-valve*?" The other men pricked up their ears. "Are you *sure* there's a dead man up on the butte? You ain't been out in the sun too long, have you, Jim?" One of the men in back guffawed.

"No, I haven't, and there *is* a dead man up there, and, as you said, the longer we put it off . . ."

Les started the car again with a jerk. "What the hell do you mean, a *tire-valve*?"

"Well, there's a black stem about six inches in diameter coming out of the ground.

Looks like rubber or some similar stuff but it's petrified. It's about two feet high and at the top there's a threaded metal insert with a metal cap screwed on it. The stem has a little crack near the bottom and there's air leaking out."

There was another guffaw from the rear and its perpetrator offered a comment: "Hot air, no doubt."

We had reached the end of the road and we all piled out. Les distributed the ropes and pikes among his four unwilling helpers and we started the short hike to the foot of the butte. We got to the body with little trouble and Les supervised the job of securing it in an improvised sling for the descent. He saw the four men safely on the way to the bottom and then turned to me. "Now let's go on up to the top. I want to see that valve."

IT WOULD HAVE been easy to find even if I hadn't known exactly where it was, for the noise of the escaping air was louder. I took him to it and pointed out the valve without a word.

"Jeez!" was all he could say at first, and then, after a long pause, "Do you suppose . . . ?"

"That's what I've been wondering. It seems just plain idiotic, but perhaps . . . ?"

"A big balloon," he interrupted. "Do you suppose it can real-

ly be just a goddam big balloon?"

"That poor guy said we have to fix the valve. What do you suppose *he* thought?"

Les stopped and reached toward the valve. "Hold it!" I said sharply and he pulled his arm back. "That's what I did and it made the leak worse. That's probably what the dead man did, too. Question is, how are we going to fix it?"

"A good question, Jim. If the slightest touch . . . Maybe we could spray something on it. All kinds of gunk in spray-cans these days."

We decided to try that and started the descent. "What are we going to tell the others?" I asked, and Les stopped short.

"Hell, I hadn't thought of that. What *can* we tell 'em? If we tell 'em what we think . . . ?"

"Well, we can *show* it to them."

"Yes . . . And then the whole damn world will hear about it. And anyone who can will come to look at it and break it off, most likely, and all the rest will laugh and blame it on the heat or the silly season, or something."

"I suppose you're right. But we have to tell them *something*."

Les was silent the rest of the way to the car, thinking. I was, too, but it was he who had the best idea, though it made me look a little foolish. When he had seen that the body was

safely stowed in the trunk of the car and the inevitable question came, he replied casually, "Well, it's an odd formation, all right. Sure does look like a big tire-valve in the shadow of that cairn it's in, but in the light of my flashlight . . ."

He left it at that and the man in back guffawed again, not knowing that Les hadn't removed the flash from his pocket.

It doesn't take much to create a stir in a small town. We never found out who the stranger had been, even when the news services sent out small items about his untimely death in such an odd location. Apparently he was just one of those anonymous individuals who can vanish from Earth without leaving a ripple. He certainly had a fine funeral, though. The townspeople all chipped in, probably out of gratitude for providing them such an unusual diversion in their humdrum lives.

Les and I figured that a day or two wouldn't make much difference, so after the excitement was all over we sneaked off one afternoon with a box full of spray cans of every sort of sticky stuff we could find. We had picked it up a little at a time, here and there, and when we were ready we made sure nobody saw us leave.

I'm getting just a little bit tired of climbing this goddam

butte," Les said when we were on the way up. "I hope this is the last time we have to do it."

"So do I, but we'd better cross our fingers."

We tried first a can of pressurized contact adhesive and the very first shot stopped the leak abruptly. "Well, that was easy," I remarked, grinning. "What were we worried . . ."

THE HISS started again. I suppose the cooling effect of the spray on the hot valve did it, but at any rate another crack had appeared suddenly just above the old one. Hastily Les shot some more of the stuff on it. Once more there was silence for a moment and then the hiss began again. We could see no new crack but traced the leak to one that had opened up in the rear part of the stem which we couldn't see. It was a touchy job reaching around to spray that one, but eventually, it was sealed. Then the hissing began again, but with a muffled sound. By careful probing with moist fingers we found that the air was coming from a leak just below ground-level.

"That does it!" Les exclaimed. "What the hell do we do now?"

"Do you suppose we could dig carefully around it and . . ."

"Are you crazy? The slightest touch cracks it and you want to . . . No! That's out!"

"I suppose you're right. I wonder if we could dump con-

crete all around it. Bury the goddam thing in concrete."

"And risk breaking it off completely?"

"Well, tar, then. Bury it in hot tar, and when that sets, cover it all over with concrete. If the temperature of the tar is close enough to that of the valve . . ."

"You *might* have something, Jim. But how we gonna get all that stuff up here?"

We had to make half a dozen trips and we used up three cylinders of propane heating the tar with a torch. The top stone of the cairn was in the way so we carefully removed it and set it up to form an east wall. Then we slowly poured in the hot tar which overflowed and ran down the sides of the stone form. We listened closely and could hear no escaping air. Les painstakingly crossed all his fingers two by two and held them up for me to see.

"I wonder who the hell made this shoddy thing," he said then.

"Oh, it's not so shoddy, Les. After all, it's already lasted a good many millions of years — or is it billions? I'll bet the guarantee period was up a long time ago."

"Yeah, but *what* a way to go! I'll bet nobody ever . . ."

The sound was faint but unmistakable. Air was seeping out of the ground at several places

around the circle of tar. As we watched a bubble rose on the surface of the tar, gradually enlarged and finally broke with a soft "plop".

While the tar was cooling we added the laboriously-carried water to the concrete ready-mix and got it all ready. When half-formed bubbles stopped enlarging and a cautious poke with a finger showed the tar had set, we dumped the concrete over the tar and the area around it. I straightened up and dusted my hands.

"Maybe we ought to make this public, Les. Perhaps somebody in government or industry could think of a way to fix it."

"Too late, I'm afraid. Even if we could convince someone that we're not out of our minds, what can we show to prove it? Just a big pile of concrete on top of this goddam butte, that's all. And what will happen if anyone starts to *remove* it?"

I thought about that for a moment. "We might as well go back," I said listlessly.

* * *

Did you feel that tremble? I did, faint as it was, and I felt the others. They started about a week ago and they come every twenty minutes, more or less. I keep thinking I hear the hiss of escaping air, too, though that is obviously impossible.

The Door in the Wall

by H. G. Wells

The first collection of H. G. Wells' short stories appeared in 1895, under the title of *The Time Machine and Other Stories*, and the present tale comes from this series. Our thanks to SAM MOSKOWITZ for recommending it.

ONE CONFIDENTIAL evening, not three months ago, Lionel Wallace told me this story of the Door in the Wall. And at the time I thought that so far as he was concerned, it was a true story.

He told it to me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere; and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamor of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focused shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and me, and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of

the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from everyday realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. "He was mystifying!" I said, and then, "How well he did it! . . . It isn't quite the thing I should have expected him, of all people, to do well."

Afterwards as I sat up in bed and sipped my morning tea, I found myself trying to account for the flavor of reality that perplexed me in his impossible reminiscences, by supposing they did in some way suggest, present, convey — I hardly know which word to use — experiences it was otherwise impossible to tell.

Well, I don't resort to that

explanation now. I have got over my intervening doubts. I believe now, as I believed at the moment of telling, that Wallace did to the very best of his ability, strip the truth of his secret for me. But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess. Even the facts of his death, which ended my doubts forever, throw no light on that.

That much the reader must judge for himself.

I forget now what chance comment or criticism of mine moved so reticent a man to confide in me. He was, I think, defending himself against an imputation of slackness and unreliability I had made in relation to a great public movement, in which he had disappointed me. But he plunged suddenly. "I have," he said, "a preoccupation . . .

"I know," he went on, after a pause, "I have been negligent. The fact is — it isn't a case of ghosts or apparitions — but — it's an odd thing to tell of, Redmond — I am haunted. I am haunted by something — that rather takes the light out of things, that fills me with longings . . ."

He paused, checked by that English shyness that so often overcomes us when we would

speak of moving or grave or beautiful things. "You were at Saint Althelstan's all through," he said, and for a moment that seemed to me quite irrelevant. "Well" — and he paused. Then very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Now that I have the clue to it, the thing seems written visibly in his face. I have a photograph in which that look of detachment has been caught and intensified. It reminds me of what a woman once said of him — a woman who had loved him greatly. "Suddenly," she said, "the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn't care a rap for you — under his very nose . . ."

YET THE interest was not always out of him, and when he was holding his attention to a thing Wallace could contrive to be an extremely successful man. His career, indeed, is set with successes. He left me behind him long ago; he soared up over my head, and cut a figure in the world that I couldn't cut — anyhow. He was still a year short of forty, and they say now that he would have

been in office and very probably in the new Cabinet if he had lived. At school he always beat me without effort — as it were by nature. We were at school together at Saint Althelstan's College in West Kensington for almost all our school-time. He came into the school as my co-equal, but he left far above me, in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance. Yet I think I made a fair average running. And it was at school I heard first of the "Door in the Wall" — that I was to hear of a second time only a month before his death.

To him, at least, the Door in the Wall was a real door, leading through a real wall to immortal realities. Of that I am now quite assured.

And it came into his life quite early, when he was a little fellow between five and six. I remember how, as he sat making his confession to me with a slow gravity, he reasoned and reckoned the date of it. "There was," he said, "a crimson Virginia creeper in it — all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow, though I don't clearly remember how, and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new

fallen. I take it that means October. I look out for horse-chestnut leaves every year and I ought to know.

"If I'm right in that, I was about five years and four months old."

He was, he said, rather a precocious little boy — he learned to talk at an abnormally early age, and he was so sane and "old-fashioned," as people say, that he was permitted an amount of initiative that most children scarcely attain by seven or eight. His mother died when he was two, and he was under the less vigilant and authoritative care of a nursery governess. His father was a stern, preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention and expected great things of him. For all his brightness he found life gray and dull, I think. And one day he wandered.

He could not recall the particular neglect that enabled him to get away, nor the course he took among the West Kensington roads. All that had faded among the incurable blurs of memory. But the white wall and the green door stood out quite distinctly.

As his memory of that childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he

had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him — he could not tell which — to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning — unless memory has played him the queerest trick — that the door was unfasteend, and that he could go in as he chose.

I SEEM TO see the figure of that little boy, drawn and repelled. And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went in through that door.

Wallace described all these moments of hesitation to me with the utmost particularity. He went right past the door, and then, with his hands in his pockets and making an infantile attempt to whistle, strolled right along beyond the end of the wall. There he recalls a number of mean dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead, ball taps, pattern books of wall paper, and tins of enamel. He stood pretending to examine these things, and coveting, passionately desiring, the green door.

Then, he said, he had a gust of emotion. He made a run for it, lest hesitation should grip him again; he went plump with

outstretched hand through the green door and let it slam behind him. And so, in a trice, he came into the garden that has haunted all his life.

It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well-being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its color clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad — as only in rare moments, and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there. . . .

Wallace mused before he went on telling me. "You see," he said, with the doubtful inflection of a man who pauses at incredible things, "there were two great panthers there. . . . Yes, spotted panthers. And I was not afraid. There was a long wide path with marble-edged flower borders on either side and these two huge velvety beasts were playing there with a ball. One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out, and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide,

this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home.

"You know, in the very moment the door swung to behind me, I forgot the road with its fallen chestnut leaves, its cabs and tradesmen's carts, I forgot the sort of gravitational pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life. I became, in a moment, a very glad and wonder-happy little boy — in another world. It was a world with a different quality, a warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky. And before me ran this long wide path, invitingly, with weedless beds on either side, rich with untended flowers, and these two great panthers. I put my little hands fearlessly on their soft fur, and caressed their round ears and the sensitive corners under their ears, and played with them, and it was as though they welcomed me home.

"There was a keen sense of home-coming in my mind, and when presently a tall, fair girl appeared in the pathway and came to meet me, smiling, and said 'Well?' to me, and lifted

me and kissed me, and put me down and led me by the hand, there was no amazement, but only an impression of delightful rightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked. There were broad red steps, I remember, that came into view between spikes of delphinium, and up these we went to a great avenue between very old and shady dark trees. All down this avenue, you know, between the red chapped stems, were marble seats of honor and statuary, and very tame and friendly white doves. . . .

"Along this cool avenue my girl-friend led me, looking down — I recall the pleasant lines, the finely-modeled chin of her sweet kind face — asking me questions in a soft, agreeable voice, and telling me things, pleasant things I know, though what they were I was never able to recall. . . . Presently a Capuchin monkey, very clean, with a fur of ruddy brown and kindly hazel eyes, came down a tree to us and ran beside me, looking up at me and grinning, and presently leaped to my shoulder. So we two went on our way in great happiness."

He paused.

"Go on," I said.

"I REMEMBER little things. We passed an old man musing among laurels, I remember, and a place gay with paroquets, and

came through a broad shaded colonnade to a spacious cool palace, full of pleasant fountains, full of beautiful things, full of the quality and promise of heart's desire. And there were many things and many people, some that still seem to stand out clearly and some that are vaguer; but all these people were beautiful and kind. In some way — I don't know how — it was conveyed to me that they all were kind to me, glad to have me there, and filling me with gladness by their gestures, by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love in their eyes. Yes . . .

He mused for a while. "Playmates I found there. That was very much to me, because I was a lonely little boy. They played delightful games in a grass-covered court where there was a sun-dial set about with flowers. And as one played one loved. . . .

"But — it's odd — there's a gap in my memory. I don't remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again — in my nursery — by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me. . . . Then presently came a somber dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy

eyes, a somber woman, wearing a soft long robe of pale purple, who carried a book, and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall — though my playmates were loth to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was carried away. 'Come back to us!' they cried. 'Come back to us soon!'

"I looked at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave. She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee. The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marveling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born. . . .

"It was wonderful to me, because the pages of that book were not pictures, you understand, but realities."

Wallace paused gravely — looked at me doubtfully.

"Go on," I said. "I understand."

"They were realities — yes, they must have been; people moved, things came and went in them; my dear mother, whom I had near forgotten; then my father, stern and upright, the servants, the nursery, all the familiar things of home. Then the front door and the busy streets with traffic to and fro. I looked

and marveled, and looked half doubtfully again into the woman's face and turned the pages over skipping this and that, to see more of this book and more, and so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall, and felt again the conflict and the fear.

"And next?" I cried, and would have turned on, but the cool hand of the grave woman delayed me.

"Next?" I insisted, and struggled gently with her hand, pulling up her fingers with all my childish strength, and as she yielded and the page came over she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow.

"BUT THE PAGE did not show the enchanted garden, nor the girl who had led me by the hand, nor the playfellows who had been so loth to let me go. It showed a long gray street in West Kensington, in that chill hour of afternoon before the lamps are lit; and I was there, a wretched little figure, weeping aloud, for all that I could do to restrain myself, and I was weeping because I could not return to my dear playfellows who had called after me, 'Come back to us! Come back to us soon!' I was there. This was no page in a book, but harsh reality; that enchanted place and the restraining hand of the grave mother at whose

knee I stood had gone — whether had they gone?"

He halted again, and remained for a time staring into that fire.

"Oh! the woefulness of that return!" he murmured.

"Well?" I said, after a minute or so.

"Poor little wretch I was! — brought back to this gray world again! As I realized the fullness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful homecoming remain with me still. I see again in the benevolent-looking old gentleman in gold spectacles who stopped and spoke to me — prodding me first with his umbrella. 'Poor little chap,' said he; 'and are you lost then?' — and me a London boy of five and more! And he must needs bring in a kindly young policeman and make a crowd of me, and so march me home. Sobbing, conspicuous, and frightened, I came back from the enchanted garden to the steps of my father's house.

"That is as well as I can remember my vision of that garden — the garden that haunts me still. Of course, I can convey nothing of that indescribable quality of translucent unreality, that *difference* from the common things of experience that hung about it all; but that — that is what happened. If it

was a dream, I am sure it was a daytime and altogether extraordinary dream. . . . H'm! — naturally there followed a terrible questioning, by my aunt, my father, the nurse, the governess — everyone. . . .

"I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then, as I said, everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it. Even my fairy-tale books were taken away from me for a time — because I was too 'imaginative.' Eh? Yes, they did that! My father belonged to the old school. . . . And my story was driven back upon myself. I whispered it to my pillow — my pillow that was often damp and salt to my whispering lips with childish tears. And I added always to my official and less fervent prayers this one heartfelt request: 'Please, God, I may dream of the garden. Oh! take me back to my garden!'

"Take me back to my garden! I dreamt often of the garden. I may have added to it. I may have changed it; I do not know. . . . All this, you understand, is an attempt to reconstruct from fragmentary memories a very early experience. Between that and the other consecutive memories of my boyhood there is a gulf. A time came when it

seemed impossible I should ever speak of that wonder glimpse again."

I ASKED AN obvious question.

"No," he said. "I don't remember that I ever attempted to find my way back to the garden in those early years. This seems odd to me now, but I think that very probably a closer watch was kept on my movements after this misadventure to prevent my going astray. No, it wasn't till you knew me that I tried for the garden again. And I believe there was a period — incredible as it seems now — when I forgot the garden altogether — when I was about eight or nine it may have been. Do you remember me as a kid at Saint Althelstan's?"

"Rather!"

"I didn't show any signs, did I, in those days of having a secret dream?"

2

HE LOOKED UP with a sudden smile.

"Did you ever play North-West Passage with me? . . . No, of course you didn't come my way!"

"It was the sort of game," he went on, "that every imaginative child plays all day. The idea was the discovery of a North-West Passage to school. The way to school was plain enough;

the game consisted in finding some way that wasn't plain, starting off ten minutes early in some almost hopeless direction, and working my way round through unaccustomed streets to my goal. And one day I got entangled among some rather low-class streets on the other side of Campden Hill, and I began to think that for once the game would be against me and that I should get to school late. I tried rather desperately a street that seemed a *cul-de-sac*, and found a passage at the end. I hurried through that with renewed hope. 'I shall do it yet,' I said, and passed a row of frowsy little shops that were inexplicably familiar to me, and behold! there was my long white wall and green door that led to the enchanted garden!

"The thing whacked upon me suddenly. Then, after all, that garden, that wonderful garden, wasn't a dream!"

He paused.

"I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn't for a moment think of going in straight away. You see . . . For one thing, my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time — set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt *some* little desire at

least to try the door — yes. I must have felt that. . . . But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school. I was immensely interested by this discovery I had made, of course — I went on with my mind full of it — but I went on. It didn't check me. I ran past, tugging out my watch, found I had ten minutes still to spare, and then I was going downhill into familiar surroundings. I got to school, breathless, it is true, and wet with perspiration, but in time. I can remember hanging up my coat and hat. . . . Went right by it and left it behind me. Odd, eh?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "Of course I didn't know then that it wouldn't always be there. Schoolboys have limited imaginations. I suppose I thought it was an awfully jolly thing to have it there, to know my way back to it; but there was the school tugging at me. I expect I was a good deal distraught and inattentive that morning, recalling what I could of the beautiful strange people I should presently see again. Oddly enough I had no doubt in my mind that they would be glad to see me. . . . Yes, I must have thought of the garden that morning just as a jolly sort of place to which one might resort

in the interludes of a strenuous scholastic career.

"I didn't go that day at all. The next day was a half-holiday, and that may have weighed with me. Perhaps, too, my state of inattention brought down impositions upon me, and docked the margin of time necessary for the *detour*. I don't know. What I do know is that in the meantime the enchanted garden was so much upon my mind that I could not keep it to myself.

"I told — what was his name? — a ferrety-looking youngster we used to call Squiff."

"Young Hopkins," said I.

"Hopkins it was. I did not like telling him. I had a feeling that in some way it was against the rules to tell him, but I did. He was walking part of the way home with me; he was talkative, and if we had not talked about the enchanted garden we should have talked of something else, and it was intolerable to me to think about any other subject. So I blabbed.

"WELL, HE told my secret. The next day in the play interval I found myself surrounded by half a dozen bigger boys, half teasing, and wholly curious to hear more of the enchanted garden. There was that big Fawcett — you remember him? — and Carnaby and Morley Reynolds. You weren't there by any chance? No, I think I should

have remembered if you were.

"A boy is a creature of odd feelings. I was, I really believe in spite of my secret self-disgust, a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows. I remember particularly a moment of pleasure caused by the praise of Crawshaw — you remember Cranshaw major, the son of Cranshaw the composer? — who said it was the best lie he had ever heard. But at the same time there was a really painful undertow of shame at telling what I felt was indeed a sacred secret. That beast Fawcett made a joke about the girl in green . . ."

Wallace's voice sank with the keen memory of that shame. "I pretended not to hear," he said. "Well, then Carnaby suddenly called me a young liar, and disputed with me when I said the thing was true. I said I knew where to find the green door, could lead them all there in ten minutes. Carnaby became outrageously virtuous, and said I'd have to — and bear out my words or suffer. Did you ever have Carnaby twist your arm? Then perhaps you'll understand how it went with me. I swore my story was true. There was nobody in the school then to save a chap from Carnaby, though Crawshaw put in a word or so. Carnaby had got his game. I grew excited and red-eared, and a little frightened. I behaved altogether like

a silly little chap, and the outcome of it all was that instead of starting alone for my enchanted garden, I led the way presently — cheeks flushed, ears smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame — for a party of six mocking, curious, and threatening schoolfellows.

"We never found the white wall and the green door. . . ."

"You mean . . .?"

"I mean I couldn't find it. I would have found it if I could.

"And afterwards when I could go alone I couldn't find it. I never found it. I seem now to have been always looking for it through my school-boy days, but I never came upon it — never."

"Did the fellows — make it disagreeable?"

"Beastly. . . . Carnaby held a council over me for wanton lying. I remember how I sneaked home and upstairs to hide the marks of my blubbering. But when I cried myself to sleep at last it wasn't for Carnaby, but for the garden, for the beautiful afternoon I had hoped for, for the sweet, friendly women and the waiting playfellows, and the game I had hoped to learn again, that beautiful forgotten game. . . .

"I believed firmly that if I had not told . . . I had bad times after that — crying at night and wool-gathering by day. For two terms I slacked and had bad reports. Do you

remember? Of course you would! It was *you* — your beating me in mathematics that brought me back to the grind again."

3

FOR A TIME my friend stared silently into the red heart of the fire. Then he said: "I never saw it again until I was seventeen.

"It leaped upon me for the third time — as I was driving to Paddington on my way to Oxford and a scholarship. I had just one momentary glimpse. I was leaning over the apron of my hansom smoking a cigarette, and no doubt thinking myself no end of a man of the world, and suddenly there was the door, the wall, the dear sense of unforgettable and still attainable things.

"We clattered by — I, too taken by surprise to stop my cab until we were well past and round a corner. Then I had a queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will. I tapped the little door in the roof of the cab, and brought my arm down to pull out my watch. 'Yes, sir!' said the cabman, smartly. 'Er — well — it's nothing.' I cried. 'My mistakel! We haven't much time! Go on!' And he went on. . . .

"I got my scholarship. And the night after I was told of that I sat over my fire in my

little upper room, my study, in my father's house, with his praise — his rare praise — and his sound counsels ringing in my ears, and I smoked my favorite pipe — the formidable bulldog of adolescence — and thought of that door in the long white wall. 'If I had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford — muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then his career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

"Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world. I saw another door opening — the door of my career."

He stared again into the fire. Its red light picked out a stubborn strength in his face for just one flickering moment, and then it vanished again.

"Well," he said and sighed, "I have served that career. I have done — much work, much hard work. But I have dreamt of the enchanted garden a thousand dreams, and seen its dor, or at least glimpsed its door, four times since then. Yes — four times. For a while this world was so bright and interesting, seemed so full of meaning and opportunity, that the half-ef-faced charm of the garden was

by comparison gentle and remote. Who wants to pat panthers on the way to dinner with pretty women and distinguished men? I came down to London from Oxford, a man of bold promise that I have done something to redeem. Something — and yet there have been disappointments. . . .

"TWICE I HAVE been in love — I will not dwell on that — but once, as I went to someone who, I knew, doubted whether I dared to come, I took a short cut at a venture through an unfrequented road near Earl's Court, and so happened on a white wall and a familiar green door. 'Oddl' said I to myself, 'but I thought this place was on Campden Hill. It's the place I never could find somehow — like counting Stonehenge — the place of that queer daydream of mine.' And I went by it intent upon my purpose. It had no appeal to me that afternoon.

"I had just a moment's impulse to try the door, three steps aside were needed at the most — though I was sure enough in my heart that it would open to me — and then I thought that doing so might delay me on the way to that appointment in which my honor was involved. Afterwards I was sorry for my punctuality — I might at least have peeped in and waved a hand to those panthers, but

I knew enough by this time not to seek again belatedly that which is not found by seeking. Yes, that time made me very sorry. . . .

"Years of hard work after that, and never a sight of the door. It's only recently it has come back to me. With it there has come a sense as though some thin tarnish had spread itself over my world. I began to think of it as a sorrowful and bitter thing that I should never see that door again. Perhaps I was suffering a little from over-work — perhaps it was what I've heard spoken of as the feeling of forty. I don't know. But certainly the keen brightness that makes effort easy has gone out of things recently, and that just at a time — with all these new political developments — when I ought to be working. Odd, isn't it? But I do begin to find life toilsome, its rewards, as I come near them, cheap. I began a little while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes — and I've seen it three times."

"The garden?"

"No — the door! And I haven't gone in!"

He leaned over the table to me, with an enormous sorrow in his voice as he spoke. "Thrice I have had my chance — *thrice!* If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in, out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity,

out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay. . . . I swore it, and when the time came — *I didn't go.*

"Three times in one year have I passed that door and failed to enter. Three times in the last year.

"The first time was on the night of the snatch division on the Tenants' Redemption Bill, on which the Government was saved by a majority of three. You remember? No one on our side — perhaps very few on the opposite side — expected the end that night. Then the debate collapsed like eggshells. I and Hotchkiss were dining with his cousin at Brentford; we were both unpaired, and we were called up by telephone, and set off at once in his cousin's motor. We got in barely in time, and on the way we passed my wall and door — livid in the moonlight, blotched with hot yellow as the glare of our lamps lit it, but unmistakable. 'My God!' cried I. 'What?' said Hotchkiss. 'Nothing!' I answered, and the moment passed.

"I've made a great sacrifice," I told the whip as I got in. "They all have," he said, and hurried by.

"I do not see how I could have done otherwise then. And the next occasion was as I rushed to my father's bedside to bid that stern old man farewell. Then, too, the claims of life

were imperative. But the third time was different; it happened a week ago. It fills me with hot remorse to recall it. I was with Gurker and Ralphs — it's no secret now, you know, that I've had my talk with Gurker. We had been dining at Frobisher's, and the talk had become intimate between us. The question of my place in the reconstructed Ministry lay always just over the boundary of the discussion. Yes — yes. That's all settled. It needn't be talked about yet, but there's no reason to keep a secret from you. . . . Yes — thanks! thanks! But let me tell you my story.

"THEN, ON THAT night things were very much in the air. My position was a very delicate one. I was keenly anxious to get some definite word from Gurker, but was hampered by Ralphs's presence. I was using the best power of my brain to keep that light and careless talk not too obviously directed to the point that concerned me. I had to. Ralphs's behavior since has more than justified my caution. . . . Ralphs, I knew, would leave us beyond the Kensington High Street, and then I could surprise Gurker by a sudden frankness. One has sometimes to resort to these little devices. . . . And then it was that in the margin of the field of vision I became aware once more of the white wall,

the green door before us down the road.

"We passed it talking. I passed it. I can still see the shadow of Gurker's marked profile, his opera hat tilted forward over his prominent nose, the many folds of his neck wrap going before my shadow and Ralphs's as we sauntered past.

"I passed within twenty inches of the door. 'If I say good-night to them, and go in,' I asked myself, 'what will happen?' And I was all a-tingle for that word with Gurker.

"I could not answer that question in the tangle of my other problems. 'They will think me mad,' I thought. 'And suppose I vanish now! — Amazing disappearance of a prominent politician!' That weighed with me. A thousand inconceivably petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis."

Then he turned on me with a sorrowful smile, and, speaking slowly. "Here I am!" he said.

"Here I am!" he repeated, "and my chance has gone from me. Three times in one year the door has been offered me — the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on Earth can know. And I have rejected it, Redmond, and it has gone . . ."

"How do you know?"

"I know. I know. I am left now to work it out, to stick to

the tasks that held me so strongly when my moments came. You say I have success — this vulgar, tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it." He had a walnut in his big hand. "If that was my success," he said, and crushed it, and held it out for me to see.

"Let me tell you something, Redmond. This loss is destroying me. For two months, for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all, except the most necessary and urgent duties. My soul is full of inappeasable regrets. At nights — when it is less likely I shall be recognized — I go out. I wander. Yes. I wonder what people would think of that if they knew. A Cabinet Minister, the responsible head of that most vital of all departments, wandering alone — grieving — sometimes near audibly lamenting — for a door, for a garden!"

4

I CAN SEE now his rather pallid face, and the unfamiliar somber fire that had come into his eyes. I see him very vividly tonight. I sit recalling his words, his tones, and last evening's *Westminster Gazette* still lies on my sofa, containing the notice of his death. At lunch today the club was busy with his death. We talked of nothing else.

They found his body very

early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward. It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding between two gangers, and through it he made his way.

My mind is darkened with questions and riddles.

It would seem he walked all the way from the House that night — he has frequently walked home during the past Session — and so it is I figure his dark form coming along the late and empty streets, wrapped up, intent. And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, any green door in the wall at all?

I do not know. I have told his story as he told it to me. There are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of the coincidence between a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination and a careless trap, but that indeed is not my profoundest belief. You may think me super-

stitious, if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something — I know not what — that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it be-

trayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death.

But did he see like that?



FROM NEW ZEALAND

Soon after we had closed the May issue, wherein we lamented the lack of a Lovecraft chronology, our eyes fell on a copy of August Derleth's little book, *HPL: A Memoir* nestled on our shelves at home. For some reason we were impelled to take it out and browse — and there was a chronology eyeball-to-eyeball with us, as it were. We decided to let you, the readers, chastise us for this blunder, and T. L. G. Cockcroft of 84, Pharazyn, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, has done so. Mr. Cockcroft is the compiler and publisher of the excellent *Index to Weird Fiction Magazines*. It is in two volumes, the first being the index by title, the second, index by authors. The two volumes sell for \$2.75 each, or \$5.00 for the set, and we can report to you that volume one is very handsome indeed. The second volume was somewhat delayed, but a further letter from Mr. Cockcroft tells me that it is now in print, and will be available from various American fantasy and science fiction book dealers by the time this notice appears in print. Of volume two he says: "You may be interested to know what is in the *Index by Author*

or, so a list of its contents is as follows: Reprinted stories; Explanatory notes; *Index by Author*; Some general notes; Stories constituting series or groups; Notes on series or groups; Translators and translations; Summary of magazines indexed; Summary of major contents of magazines.

"Although this second volume has only 44 pages, it includes as much information as the first; much space is saved, of course, as a result of it not being necessary to have the author's name with every title."

The first volume has 56 pages; but anyone interested in an index by title of the stories which appeared in *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE TALES*, *THE THRILL BOOK*, *ORIENTAL STORIES & MAGIC CARPET MAGAZINE*, *STRANGE TALES* (English), and *COLDEN FLEECE* will not find it overpriced. This is a labor of love, for even at \$2.75 per volume, a complete sell-out would not cover the costs of production. Incidentally, Mr. Cockcroft advises us that the edition of *Index by Author* has a smaller run than that of the first volume, so those desiring complete sets (or the second volume only) are duly warned.

The Three Low Masses

by Alphonse Daudet

Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897), known for such novels as *Sapho*, and plays such as *L'Arlesienne*, resented the accusation of critics that he imitated Dickens in his fiction, and did his best to refute the charge — but it would seem to us that this delightful little tale alone confirms it. And it doesn't seem to matter, either.

"TWO STUFFED turkeys, Garrigou?"

"Yes, Father, two magnificent turkeys stuffed with truffles. And I ought to know, too, for I helped stuff them myself. One would think their skins would crack while they were roasting, they are stretched so tight."

"Jesus and Mary! I who love truffles so much! . . . Quick, Garrigou, give me my surplice

. . . And besides the turkeys, what else did you see in the kitchens?"

"Oh, all sorts of good things! Ever since noon we have been plucking pheasants, hoopoes, hazel-lens and heath-cocks. The feathers filled the air. And then from the pond they brought eels, goldfish, trout, and . . ."

"How big were the trout, trout, Garrigou?"

"So big, Father! Enormous!"

"Oh, good Lord! I can fairly see them . . . Did you put the wine in the vases?"

*From "Lettres de Mon Moulin", by Alphonse Daudet.

"Yes, Father, I put the wine in the vases. But heavens! It's nothing like the wine you will have later, when you come from the midnight mass. Oh, if you could only see the dining hall, all the decanters blazing with wines of all colors! And the silverware, the chased centerpieces, the flowers the candelabral! Never was there seen such a Christmas feast! The marquis has invited all the lords of the neighboring estates. There will be at least forty of you at the table, without counting the bailiff or the notary. Ah! you are fortunate in being one of them, Father! Only from sniffing those wonderful turkeys, the odor of truffles follows me everywhere. Mmmml!"

"Come, come, my boy! Heaven preserve us from the sin of gluttony, above all on this eve of the Nativity! . . . Hurry off, now, and light the tapers and ring the first call for mass, for it will soon be midnight and we musn't be late."

THIS CONVERSATION took place one Christmas Eve in the year of grace sixteen hundred and something, between the Reverend Dom Balaguere, former prior of the Barnabites and present chaplain of the Sires of Trinquelage, and his little clerk Garrigou — or at least him whom he believed to be the little clerk Garrigou, for let me tell you that the devil, that

evening, had assumed the round face and uncertain features of the young sacristan, the better to lead the reverend Father into temptation and make him commit the frightful sin of gluttony. So while the so-called Garrigou (hm! hm!) rang out the chimes from the seigniorial chapel, the reverend Father slipped on his chasuble in the little vestry of the castle, and, his imagination already excited by Garrigou's gastronomical descriptions, he kept muttering to himself as he got into his vestments:

"Roast turkeys . . . goldfish . . . trout, so big!"

Outside, the night wind blew and spread abroad the music of the bells. Lights began to appear in the darkness on the sides of Mount Ventoux, on whose summit the old towers of Trinquelage upreared their heads. The neighboring farmers and their families were on their way to the castle to hear midnight mass. They climbed the mountain singing gayly, in groups of five or six, the father leading the way with his lantern, the women following, wrapped in great dark coats, under which the children snuggled to keep warm. In spite of the cold and the late hour of the night, all these good people walked along merrily, cheered by the thought that on coming from the mass they would find as usual, a great feast awaiting them downstairs in the castle kitchen.

From time to time, on the rough ascent, the carriage of some lord, preceded by torch-bearers, showed its glimmering windowpanes in the moonlight; or a mule trotted along shaking its bells; or again, by the gleam of the great lanterns wrapped in mist, the farmers recognized their bailiff and hailed him as he passed:

"Good evening, good evening,
Master Arnoton!"

"Good evening, good evening,
my children!"

The night was clear; the stars seemed brightened by the frost; the northeast wind was nipping; and a fine sleet powdered all these cloaks without wetting them, preserving faithfully the tradition of a Christmas white with snow. On the very crest of the mountain the castle appeared as the goal, with its huge mass of towers and gables, the chapel steeple rising straight into the blue-black sky, and a crowd of little lights moving rapidly hither and thither, winking at all the windows, and looking, against the intense black of that lordly pile, like the little sparks that run through the ashes of burnt paper.

After passing the drawbridge and the postern, in order to get to the chapel one had to cross the first court, full of coaches, footmen and sedan-chairs silhouetted against the flare of the torches and the glare from the kitchens. One could hear

the creaking of the turning spits, the clatter of pots, the tinkling of glassware and silver, as they were laid out for the banquet; and above it all floated a warm vapor smelling of roasted meats and the pungent herbs of elaborate sauces, which made the farmers, as well as the chaplain, the bailiff, and everybody say: "What a wonderful midnight feast we are going to have after the mass!"



DING-A-LING-LING! Ding-a-ling-ling! The midnight mass has begun. In the chapel of the castle, which is a miniature cathedral with its inter-crossed arches and oaken wainscoting up to the ceiling, all the tapesries are hung, all the tapers lighted. What a crowd of people! And what sumptuous costumes! Here, in one of the carven stalls that surround the choir, is the Sire of Trinquelage, clad in salmon-colored silk; and around him all the noble lords, his guests. Opposite them, on velvet fall-stools, kneel the old dowager marchioness, in a gown of flame-colored brocade, and the young lady of Trinquelage, wearing on her head a great tower of lace puffed and quilled according to the latest fashion of the French court. Farther down the aisle, all dressed in black, with vast pointed wigs and clean-shaven chins, sit

Thomas Arnoton the bailiff and Master Ambroy the notary, two somber spots among these gaudy silks and figured damasks. Then come the fat majordomos, the pages, the outriders, the stewards, and Dame Barbe, with all her keys dangling at her side on a great keyring of fine silver. On the benches in the rear is the lower service — the butlers and maids, the farmers and their families; and last of all, back by the doors, which they half open and discreetly close again, come the cooks to take a little nip of the mass between two sauces, and bring an odor of the Christmas feast into the bedecked church, which is warm with the light of so many tapers.

Can it be the sight of these little white caps that diverts the reverend Father's attention? Is it not rather Garrigou's bell? — that fiendish little bell that tinkles away at the foot of the altar with such infernal haste and seems to say all the time:

"Hurry up! Hurry up! The sooner we've finished, the sooner we shall be at the feast."

The fact is that every time this devilish little bell peals out, the chaplain forgets his mass, and his mind wanders to the Christmas feast. Visions rise before him of the cooks running busily hither and thither, the ovens glowing like furnaces, warm vapors rising from under half-lifted lids, and through these vapors two magnificent

turkeys, stuffed, crammed, mottled with truffles . . . Or then again, he sees long files of little pages carrying great dishes wrapped in their tempting fumes, and he is about to enter the dining hall with them for the feast. What ecstasy! Here stands the immense table, laden and dazzling, with peacocks dressed in their feathers, pheasants spreading their bronzed wings, ruby-colored flagons, pyramids of luscious fruit amid the green foliage, and those wonderful fish that Garrigou spoke of (Garrigou, forsooth!) reclining on a bed of fennel, their pearly scales looking as if they were just from the pond, and a bunch of pungent herbs in their monsterlike nostrils. So vivid is the vision of these marvels that Dom Balaguere actually fancies all these glorious dishes are being served before him, on the very embroideries of the altar-cloth, and two or three times, instead of *Dominus vobiscum* he catches himself saying the *Benedicite*. But except for these slight mistakes the worthy man rattled off the service conscientiously, without skipping a line or omitting a genuflection; and all went well to the end of the first mass. For you know you must know that on Christmas Eve, the same officiating priest is obliged to say three masses consecutively.

"And that's one!" said the chaplain to himself with a sigh

of relief; then, without losing a second, he motioned to his clerk, or him whom he believed to be his clerk, and . . .

DING-A-LING-LING! Ding-a-ling-ling!

The second mass has begun, and with it Dom Balaguere's sin:

"Quick, quick! let us hurry!" says Garrigou's bell in its shrill, devilish voice, and this time the unfortunate priest, possessed by the demon of gluttony, pounces upon the missal and devours its pages with the avidity of his over-excited appetite. He kneels and rises frantically, barely sketches the sign of the cross and the genuflections, and shortens all his gestures in order to get through sooner. He scarcely extends his arms at the Gospel, or strikes his breast at the *Confiteor*. Between him and the clerk it is hard to tell who mumbles the faster. Verses and responses leap out and jostle each other. The words, half uttered between their teeth — for it would take too long to open their lips every time — die out into unintelligible murmurs.

Oremus . . . ps . . . ps . . ."

"Mea culpa . . . pa . . . pa . . ."

Like hurried vintagers crushing the grapes in the vats, they both splashed about in the Latin of the service, spattering it in every direction

"*Dom . . . scum!*" says Balaguere."

" . . . *Stutuo!*" replies Garrigou; and all the time the accursed little bell jingles in their ears like the sleighbells that are put on stage-horses to make them gallop faster. You may well believe that at such speed a low mass is soon hurried out of the way.

"And that's two," says the chaplain, all out of breath; then, red in the face, perspiring freely, without taking time to breathe he goes tumbling down the altar steps and . . .

DING-A-LING-LING! Ding-a-ling-ling!

The third mass has begun. There are only a few steps between him and the dining hall; but alas! as the time approaches, the unfortunate Dom Balaguere's fever of impatience and greediness grows. His imagination waxes more vivid; the fish, the roasted turkeys, are there before him . . . he touches them . . . he — good heavens! — he breathes the perfume of the wines and the savory fumes of the dishes, and the infernal little bell calls out frantically to him:

"Hurry, hurry! Faster, faster!"

But how on earth can he go faster? — his lips barely move; he no longer pronounces his words — unless, forsooth, he chooses to cheat the good Lord and swindle him out of His mass. And that is just what he does, the wretched man! Yielding to

temptation after temptation, he begins by skipping one verse, then two; then he finds the Epistle too long, so he leaves it unfinished; he skims over the Gospel; passes the *Credo* without entering; jumps the *Pater*; salutes the preface from afar; and by leaps and bounds he plunges into eternal damnation, followed by that infamous Garrigou (*Vade retro, Satanas!*), who seconds him with marvelous sympathy, holds up his chasuble, turns the pages two at a time, jostles the lecturn, upsets the vases, and constantly rings the little bell faster and louder.

It would be impossible to describe the bewildered expression of the congregation. Compelled to follow, mimicking the priest, through this mass of which they cannot make out a single word, some get up while others kneel, some sit while others stand; and all the phases of this singular service are jumbled together along the benches in confusion of varied postures. The Christmas star on its celestial road, journeying toward the little manger yonder, grows pale at seeing such a frightful confusion.

"The abbe reads too fast; one can't follow him," murmurs the old dowager marchioness, her voluminous head-dress shaking wildly. Master Arnoton, with his great steel spectacles on his nose, hunts desperately in his

prayerbook to find where on earth is the place. But at heart, all these good people, whose minds are equally bent upon the Christmas feast, are not at all disturbed at the idea of following mass at such breakneck speed; and when Dom Balaguere, his face shining, faces them and cries out in a thundering voice, "*Ite, missa est,*" the congregation answers with a "*Deo gratias*" so joyous, so enthusiastic, that one might believe they were already at the table for the first toast of the Christmas feast.

3

FIVE MINUTES later, the assembled lords, with the chaplain in their midst, had taken their seats in the great hall. The castle, brilliantly illuminated from top to bottom, echoed with songs and laughter; and the venerable Dom Balaguere planted his fork in a capon's wing, drowning the remorse for his sin in floods of old wine and the savory juice of meats. He ate and drank so heartily, this poor holy man, that he died in the night of a terrible attack of indigestion, without even having time to repent. By morning he reached heaven, his head still swimming from the odors of the feast; and I leave you to imagine how he was received. "Get thee gone from my sight, thou wretched Christian!"

said the Sovereign Judge, the Master of us all. "Thy sin is great enough to wipe out the virtues of a lifetime! Ah, thou has stolen from me a midnight mass! Very well, then: thou shalt pay me three hundred masses in its place, and thou shalt not enter into paradise until three hundred Christmas masses have been celebrated in thine own chapel, in the presence of all those who sinned with thee and through thee."

And this is the true legend of Dom Balaguere, as it is told in the land of the olive tree. The castle of Trinquelage has long ceased to exist; but the chapel stands erect on the crest of Mount Ventoux, in a clump of evergreen oaks. The wind sways its unhinged door, the grass grows over the threshold; there are nests in the angles of the altar and on the sills of the high ogive windows, whose jeweled panes have long ago disappeared. Still, it seems that every year, on Christmas night, a supernatural light wanders among the ruins; and the peasants, on their way to midnight mass and the Christmas feast, see this specter of a chapel lighted by invisible tapers which burn in the open air, even in the wind and under the snow. You may laugh if you will, but a vine-dresser of the district, named Garrigue, no doubt a descendant of Garrigou, has told me that on one particular Christmas

night, being somewhat in liquor, he lost his way on the mountain somewhere near Trinquelage, and this is what he saw. . . . Until 11 o'clock, nothing. Everything was silent and dark. Suddenly, toward midnight, the chimes rang out from the old steeple — old, old chimes that seemed to be ringing ten leagues away. Soon lights began to tremble along the road that climbs to the castle, and vague shadows moved about. Under the portal of the chapel there were faint footsteps, and muffled voices:

"Good evening, Master Arnoton!"

"Good evening, good evening, my children!"

When they had all gone in, the vine-dresser, who was very brave, softly approached, and, looking through the broken door, beheld a singular spectacle. All those shadows that he had seen pass were now seated around the choir in the ruined nave, just as if the old benches were still there. There were fine ladies in brocades and lace head-dresses, gayly bedecked lords, peasants in flowered coats like those our grandfathers wore; all of them old, dusty, faded, weary. Every now and then some night-bird, a habitual lodger in the chapel, awakened by all these lights, would flutter about the tapers, of which the flame rose erect and vague as if it were burning behind a strip of gauze. And what

amused Garrigue most was a certain gentleman with great steel spectacles, who constantly shook his huge black wig, on which perched one of those birds, its claws entangled and its wings beating wildly.

A little old man with a child-like figure, knelt in the center of the choir and frantically

shook a tiny bell that had lost its clapper and its voice, while a priest, clad in vestments of old gold, moved hither and thither before the altar repeating orisons of which not a single syllable could be heard.

Without doubt, this was Dom Balaguere in the act of saying his third low mass.

FROM NEW ZEALAND (*continued from page 96*)

In reference to our Lovecraft chronology error, Mr. Cockroft says: "Information about the years in which Lovecraft wrote his stories has been available in several publications for many years (to mention just one, August Derleth's book, *H.P.L.: A Memoir*) so some of your remarks on page 89 of the fourth issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR seem a trifle odd. A chronology follows; I originally prepared this list about twenty years ago, with the aid of the "Tentative Bibliography" of H. P. Lovecraft prepared by Evans and Laney and published (I think) by the latter.

"1917 — *The Tomb, Dagon*

"1918 — *Polaris*

"1919 — *Beyond the Wall of Sleep, The Statement of Randolph Carter, The Doom That Came to Sarnath, The White Ship*

"1920 — *Arthur Jermyn, Celephais, The Terrible Old Man, The Temple, The Tree, From Beyond, The Picture in the House, The Cats of Ulthar*

"1921 — *The Outsider, The Other Gods, The Quest of Iranon, The Moon-Bog, The Music of Erich Zann, The Nameless City*

"1921-22 — *Herbert West: Reanimator*

"1922 — *Hypnos, The Hound, The Lurking Fear*

"1923 — *The Festival, The Rats in the Walls, The Unnamable*

"1924 — *The Shunned House, Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*

"1925 — *In the Vault, He, The Horror at Red Hook*

"1926 — *Cool Air, Pickman's Model, The Silver Key, The Call of Cthulhu, The Strange High House in the Mist*

"1926-27 — *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*

"1927 — *The Colour out of Space*

"1927-28 — *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*

"1928 — *The Dunwich Horror*

"1930 — *The Whisperer in Darkness*

"1931 — *The Shadow over Innsmouth, At the Mountains of Madness*

"1932 — *Through the Gates of the Silver Key, The Dreams in the Witch-House*

"1933 — *The Thing on the Doorstep*

"1934 — *The Shadow out of Time*

"1935 — *The Haunter of the Dark, In the Walls of Eryx*

"c. 1937 — *The Evil Clergyman*

"Stories are not necessarily in the order in which they were written inside the years in the above list!"

The Whistling Room

by William Hope Hodgson

One of the masters of strange fiction was lost to the world when William Hope Hodgson was killed at Ypres in 1918. Born in 1875, the son of an Essex clergyman, WHH left home as a youngster and spent eight years at sea. These were crucial years, for the sea lives in his finest writing. Despite their flaws as weird novels, *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* and *The Ghost Pirates* are masterful sea stories. Three books of short stories, *Men of Deep Waters*, *The Luck of the Strong*, and *Captain Gault*, and two volumes of poetry, *The Calling of the Sea* and *The Voice of the Ocean*, reflect his eight years shipboard. Various magazines and anthologies, both hard and soft covered, have reprinted several of his eeriest tales dealing with the sea, but with the single exception of *The Hog* magazines in this country have neglected the series of psychic detective stories that appeared in book form under the title of *Carnacki, Ghost-Finder*, still available from Arkham House, Sauk, Wisconsin, for \$3.00. Critics have considered this series as inferior Hodgson, and we will grant at once that the device of presenting all the stories in conversational form makes for a little difficulty and reading, and that the references to obscure oculist lore can grow tedious. Nonetheless, we found those tales in this series which dealt with genuine weird events (some of them have natural explanations) genuinely chilling and consider the present one as among the eeriest.

CARNACKI shook a friendly fist at me as I entered, late. Then he opened the door into the din-

ing room and ushered the four of us — Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and myself — in to dinner.

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We dined well, as usual, and equally as usual Carnacki was pretty silent during the meal. At the end we took our wine and cigars to our accustomed positions and Carnacki — having got himself comfortable in his big chair — began without any preliminary.

"I have just got back from Ireland, again," he said. "And I thought you chaps would be interested to hear my news. Besides, I fancy I shall see the thing clearer after I have told it all out straight. I must tell you this, though, at the beginning — up to the present moment I have been utterly and completely 'stumped.' I have tumbled upon one of the most peculiar cases of 'haunting' — or devilment of some sort — that I have come against. Now listen.

"I have been spending the last few weeks at Iastrae Castle, about twenty miles Northeast of Galway. I got a letter about a month ago from a Mr. Sid K. Tassoc, who it seemed had bought the place lately and moved in, only to find that he had got a very peculiar piece of property.

"When I reached there he met me at the station, driving a jaunting-car and drove me up to the castle, which by the way, he called a 'house-shanty.' I found that he was 'pigging it' there with his boy brother and another American who seemed to be half-servant and half-companion. It

appears that all the servants had left the place, in a body, as you might say, and now they were managing among themselves, assisted by some day-help.

"The three of them got together a scratch feed and Tassoc told me all about the trouble whilst we were at table. It is most extraordinary and different from anything that I have had to do with, though that Buzzing Case was very queer too.

"Tassoc began right in the middle of his story. 'We've got a room in this shanty,' he said, 'which has got a most infernal whistling in it, sort of haunting it. The thing starts any time, you never know when, and it goes on until it frightens you. It's not ordinary whistling and it isn't the wind. Wait till you hear it.'

"We're all carrying guns," said the boy, and slapped his coat pocket.

"As bad as that?" I said, and the older brother nodded. 'I may be soft,' he replied, 'but wait till you've heard it. Sometimes I think it's some infernal thing and the next moment I'm just as sure that someone's playing a trick on us.'

"Why?" I asked. "What is to be gained?"

"You mean," he said, "that people usually have some good reason for playing tricks as elaborate as this. Well, I'll tell you. There's a lady in this province by the name of Miss Donnehue who's going to be my wife, this

day two months. She's more beautiful than they make them, and so far as I can see, I've just stuck my head into an Irish hornet's nest. There's about a score of hot young Irishmen been courting her these two years gone and now that I've come along and cut them out they feel raw gaainst me. Do you begin to understand the possibilities?"

"Yes," I said. "Perhaps I do in a vague sort of way, but I don't see how all this affects the room."

"Like this," he said. "When I'd fixed it up with Miss Donne-hue I looked out for a place and bought this little house-shanty. Afterwards I told her — one evening during dinner — that I'd decided to tie up here. And then she asked me whether I wasn't afraid of the whistling room. I told her it must have been thrown in gratis, as I'd heard nothing about it. There were some of her men friends present and I saw a smile go round. I found out after a bit of questioning that several people have bought this place during the last twenty odd years. And it was always on the market again, after a trial.

"Well, the chaps started to bait me a bit and offered to take bets after dinner that I'd not stay six months in this shanty. I looked once or twice at Miss Donne-hue so as to be sure I was 'getting the note' of the talkee-talkee, but I could see that she

didn't take it as a joke at all. Partly, I think, because there was a bit of a sneer in the way the men were tackling me and partly because she really believes there is something in this yarn of the whistling room.

"However, after dinner I did what I could to even things up with the others. I nailed all their bets and screwed them down good and safe. I guess some of them are going to be hard hit, unless I lose; which I don't mean to. Well, there you have practically the whole yarn."

"Not quite," I told him. "All that I know is that you have bought a castle with a room in it that is in some way 'queer,' and that you've been doing some betting. Also, I know that your servants have got frightened and run away. Tell me something about the whistling."

"O, that!" said Tassoc. "That started the second night we were in. I'd had a good look around the room in the daytime, as you can understand; for the talk up at Arlestrae — Miss Donne-hue's place — had me wonder a bit. But it seems just as usual as some of the other rooms in the old wing only perhaps a bit more lonesome feeling. But that may be only because of the talk about it, you know."

"The whistling started about ten o'clock on the second night, as I said. Tom and I were in the library when we heard an awfully queer whistling coming along

the East Corridor — the room is in the East Wing, you know.

“ ‘That’s that blessed ghost!’ I said to Tom and we collared the lamps off the table and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor it took me a bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune in a way, but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you and going to get round at your back. That’s how it makes you feel.

“ When we got to the door we didn’t wait, but rushed it open, and then I tell you the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. Tom said he got it the same way — sort of felt stunned and bewildered. We looked all around and soon got so nervous, we just cleared out and I locked the door.

“ We came down here and had a stiff peg each. Then we landed fit again and began to feel we’d been nicely had. So we took sticks and went out into the grounds, thinking after all it must be some of these confounded Irishmen working the ghost-trick on us. But there was not a leg stirring.

“ We went back into the house and walked over it and then paid another visit to the room. But we simply couldn’t stand it. We fairly ran out and locked the door again. I don’t know how to put it into words, but I had a feeling of being up against something that was rottenly danger-

ous. You know! We’ve carried our guns ever since.

“ Of course we had a real turn-out of the room next day and the whole house-place, and we even hunted round the grounds but there was nothing queer. And now I don’t know what to think, except that the sensible part of me tells me that it’s some plan of these Wild Irishmen to try to take a rise out of me.”

“ Done anything since? I asked him.

“ Yes,’ he said. ‘Watched outside of the door of the room at night and chased around the grounds and sounded the walls and floor of the room. We’ve done everything we could think of and it’s beginning to get on our nerves, so we sent for you.’

“ By this we had finished eating. As we rose from the table Tassoc suddenly called out, ‘Ssh! Hark!’

“ WE WERE instantly silent, listening. Then I heard it, an extraordinary hoooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman, coming from far away through corridors to my right.

“ By God! said Tassoc, ‘and it’s scarcely dark yet! Collar those candles, both of you and come along.’

“ In a few moments we were all out of the door and racing up the stairs. Tassoc turned into a long corridor and we followed, shielding our candles as we ran.

The sound seemed to fill all the passage as we drew near, until I had the feeling that the whole air throbbed under the power of some wanton Immense Force — a sense of an actual taint, as you might say, of monstrosity all about us.

"Tassoc unlocked the door then, giving it a push with his foot, jumped back and drew his revolver. As the door flew open the sound beat out at us with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it — with a certain, horrible personal note in it, as if in there in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in a mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and hooning, and yet all the time aware of you in particular. To stand there and listen was to be stunned by Realization. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly and said: That's Hell. And you knew that they had spoken the truth. Do you get it, even a little bit?

"I stepped a pace into the room and held the candle over my head and looked quickly round. Tassoc and his brother joined me and the man came up at the back and we all held our candles high. I was deafened with the shrill, piping hoon of the whistling and then, clear in my ear something seemed to be saying to me, 'Get out of here—quick! Quick! Quick!'

"As you chaps know, I never

neglect that sort of thing. Sometimes it may be nothing but nerves, but as you will remember, it was just such a warning that saved me in the 'Gray Dog' Case and in the 'Yellow Finger' Experiments, as well as other times. Well, I turned sharp round to the others: 'Out!' I said. 'For God's sake, out quick!' And in an instant I had them into the passage.

"There came an extraordinary yelling scream into the hideous whistling and then, like a clap of thunder, an utter silence. I slammed the door, and locked it. Then, taking the key, I looked round at the others. They were pretty white and I imagine I must have looked that way too. And there we stood a moment, silent.

"'Come down out of this and have some whiskey,' said Tassoc, at last, in a voice he tried to make ordinary; and he led the way. I was the back man and I knew we all kept looking over our shoulders. When we got downstairs Tassoc passed the bottle round. He took a drink himself and slapped his glass on to the table. Then sat down with a thud.

"'That's a lovely thing to have in the house with you, isn't it?' he said. And directly afterwards, — 'What on Earth made you hustle us all out like that, Carnacki?'

"'Something seemed to be telling me to get out, quick,' I

said. 'Sounds a bit silly — superstitious, I know, but when you are meddling with this sort of thing you've got to take notice of queer fancies and risk being laughed at.'

"I told him then about the 'Gray Dog' business and he nodded a lot to that. 'Of course,' I said, 'this may be nothing more than those would-be rivals of yours playing some funny game, but personally, though I'm going to keep an open mind, I feel that there is something beastly and dangerous about this thing.'

"We talked for a while longer and then Tassoc suggested billiards, which we played in a pretty half-hearted fashion, and all the time cocking an ear to the door as you might say, for sounds; but none came, and later after coffee he suggested early bed and a thorough overhaul of the room on the morrow.

"**MY BEDROOM** was in the newer part of the castle and the door opened into the picture gallery. At the East end of the gallery was the entrance to the corridor of the East Wing; this was shut off from the gallery by two old and heavy oak doors which looked rather odd and quaint beside the more modern doors of the various rooms.

"When I reached my room I did not go to bed, but began to unpack my instrument-trunk, of which I had retained the key. I intended to take one or two pre-

liminary steps at once in my investigation of the extraordinary whistling.

"Presently, when the castle had settled into quietness, I slipped out of my room and across to the entrance of the great corridor. I opened one of the low, squat doors and threw the beam of my pocket search-light down the passage. It was empty and I went through the doorway and pushed-to the oak behind me. Then along the great passageway, throwing my light before and behind and keeping my revolver handy.

"I had hung a 'protection belt' of garlic round my neck and the smell of it seemed to fill the corridor and give me assurance; for as you all know, it is a wonderful 'protection' against the more usual Aeiirii forms of semi-materialization by which I supposed the whistling might be produced, though at that period of my investigation I was still quite prepared to find it due to some perfectly natural cause, for it is astonishing the enormous number of cases that prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

"In addition to wearing the necklet I had plugged my ears loosely with garlic and as I did not intend to stay more than a few minutes in the room, I hoped to be safe.

"When I reached the door and put my hand into my pocket for the key I had a sudden feeling of sickening funk. But I was not

going to back out if I could help it. I unlocked the door and turned the handle. Then I gave the door a sharp push with my foot, as Tassoc had done, and drew my revolver, though I did not expect to have any use for it, really.

"I shone the searchlight all round the room and then stepped inside with a disgustingly horrible feeling of walking slap into a waiting Danger. I stood a few seconds, expectant, and nothing happened and the empty room showed bare from corner to corner. And then, you know, I realized that the room was full of an abominable silence — can you understand that? A sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have power to make. Do you remember what I told you about the 'Silent Garden' business? Well this room had just the same malevolent silence — the beastly quietness of a thing that is looking at you and not seeable itself, and thinks that it has got you. O, I recognized it instantly and I shipped the top off my lantern so as to have light over the whole room.

"Then I set-to working like fury and keeping my glance all about me. I sealed the two windows with lengths of human hair, right across, and sealed them at every frame. As I worked a queer, scarcely perceptible tenseness stole into the air of the place and the silence seemed, if

you can understand me, to grow more solid. I knew then that I had no business there without 'full protection,' for I was practically certain that this was no mere Aeirii development, but one of the worse forms as the Saiittii, that 'Grunting Man' case — you know.

"I finished the window and hurried over to the great fireplace. This is a huge affair and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called, projecting from the back of the arch. I sealed the opening with seven human hairs — the seventh crossing the six others.

"Then just as I was making an end, a low, mocking whistle grew in the room. A cold, nervous prickling went up my spine and round my forehead from the back. The hideous sound filled all the room with an extraordinary, grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human—as if something gargantuan and monstrous made the sounds softly. As I stood there a last moment, pressing down the final seal, I had little doubt but that I had come across one of the *Inanimate* reproducing the those rare and horrible cases of functions of the *Animate*. I made a grab for my lamp and went quickly to the door, looking over my shoulder and listening for the thing that I expected. It came just as I got my hand upon the handle—a squeal of incred-

ible, malevolent anger, piercing through the low hooning of the whistling. I dashed out, slamming the door and locking it.

"I LEANT A little against the opposite wall of the corridor, feeling rather funny for it had been a hideously narrow squeak . . . *'thyr be noe sayfette to be gained bye gayrds of holieness when the monyster hath pow'r to speak throe woode and stoeue.'* So runs the passage in the Sigsand MS. and I proved it in that 'Nodding Door' business. There is no protection against this particular form of monster, except possibly for a fractional period of time; for it can reproduce itself in or take to its purposes the very protective material which you may use and has power to 'forme wythine the Pentykle,' though not immediately. There is, of course, the possibility of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual being uttered but it is too uncertain to count upon and the danger is too hideous and even then it has no power to protect for more than '*maybe fyve beats of the harte*' as the Sigsand has it.

"Inside of the room there was now a constant, meditative, hooning whistling, but presently this ceased and the silence seemed worse for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence.

"After a little I sealed the door with crossed hairs and then

cleared off down the great passage and so to bed.

"For a long time I lay awake, but managed eventualy to get some sleep. Yet, about two o'clock I was waked by the hooning whistling of the room coming to me, even through the closed doors. The sound was tremendous and seemed to beat through the whole house with a presiding sense of terror. As if (I remember thinking) some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself at the end of that great passage.

"I got up and sat on the edge of the bed, wondering whether to go along and have a look at the seal and suddenly there came a thump on my door and Tassoc walked in with his dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

"I thought it would have waked you so I came along to have a talk,' he said. 'I can't sleep. Beautiful! Isn't it?'

"Extraordinary" I said, and tossed him my case.

"He lit a cigarette and we sat and talked for about an hour, and all the time that noise went on down at the end of the big corridor.

"Suddenly Tassoc stood up. 'Let's take our guns and go and examine the brute,' he said, and turned towards the door.

"'Nol' I said. 'By Jove — *Nol* I can't say anything definite yet but I believe that room is about as dangerous as it well can be.'

"'Haunted — *really* haunted?'

he asked, keenly and without any of his frequent banter.

"I told him, of course, that I could not say a definite *yes* or *no* to such a question, but that I hoped to be able to make a statement soon. Then I gave him a little lecture on the False Re-Materialization of the Animate-Force through the Inanimate-Inert. He began then to understand the particular way in which the room might be dangerous, if it were really the subject of a manifestation.

"About an hour later the whistling ceased quite suddenly and Tassoc went off again to bed. I went back to mine also, and eventually got another spell of sleep.

"IN THE morning I walked along to the room. I found the seals on the door intact. Then I went in. The window seals and the hair were all right, but the seventh hair across the great fireplace was broken. This set me thinking. I knew that it might, very possibly have snapped, through my having tensioned it too highly; but then again, it might have been broken by something else. Yet it was scarcely possible that a man, for instance, could have passed between the six unbroken hairs for no one would even have noticed them, entering the room that way, you see; but just walked through them, ignorant of their very existence.

"I removed the other hairs and the seals. Then I looked up the chimney. It went up straight and I could see the blue sky at the top. It was a big, open flue and free from any suggestion of hiding places or corners. Yet, of course, I did not trust to any such casual examination and after breakfast I put on my overalls and climbed to the very top, sounding all the way, but I found nothing.

"Then I came down and went over the whole of the room — floor, ceiling and the walls, mapping them out in six-inch squares and sounding with both hammer and probe. But there was nothing unusual.

"Afterwards I made a three-weeks' search of the whole castle in the same thorough way, but found nothing. I went even further then for at night, when the whistling commenced I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination, as you must allow.

"Of course I did not think that any of Tassoc's rivals had fixed up any mechanical contrivance, but I thought it just possible that there had been some such thing for producing the whistling made away back in the years, perhaps with the

intention of giving the room a reputation that would insure its being free of inquisitive folk. You see what I mean? Well of course it was just possible, if this were the case, that someone knew the secret of the machinery and was utilizing the knowledge to play this devil of a prank on Tassoc. The microphone test of the walls would certainly have made this known to me, as I have said, but there was nothing of the sort in the castle so that I had practically no doubt at all now but that it was a genuine case of what is popularly termed 'haunting.'

"All this time, every night, and sometimes most of each night the hooning whistling of the Room was intolerable. It was as if an Intelligence there knew that steps were being taken against it and piped and hooned in a sort of mad, mocking contempt. I tell you, it was as extraordinary as it was horrible. Time after time I went along — tiptoeing noiselessly on stocking feet — to the sealed floor (for I always kept the Room sealed). I went at all hours of the night and often the whistling inside would seem to change to a brutally jeering note, as though the half-animate monster saw me plainly through the shut door. And all the time as I would stand, watching, the hooning of the whistling would seem to fill the whole corridor so that I used to feel a precious

lonely chap messing about there with one of Hell's mysteries.

"And every morning I would enter the room and examine the different hairs and seals. You see, after the first week, I had stretched parallel hairs all along the walls of the room and along the ceiling, but over the floor which was of polished stone I had set out little colorless wafers, tacky-side uppermost. Each wafer was numbered and they were arranged after a definite plan so that I should be able to trace the exact movements of any living thing that went across.

"You will see that no material being or creature could possibly have entered that room without leaving many signs to tell me about it. But nothing was ever disturbed and I began to think that I should have to risk an attempt to stay a night in the room in the Electric Pentacle. Mind you, I *knew* that it would be a crazy thing to do, but I was getting stumped and ready to try anything.

"Once, about midnight, I did break the seal on the door and have a quick look in, but I tell you, the whole Room gave one mad yell and seemed to come towards me in a great belly of shadows as if the walls had belied in towards me. Of course, that must have been fancy. Anyway, the yell was sufficient and I slammed the door and locked it, feeling a bit weak down my

spine. I wonder whether you know the feeling.

"And then when I had got to that state of readiness for anything I made what, at first, I thought was something of a discovery.

"TWAS ABOUT one in the morning and I was walking slowly round the castle, keeping in the soft grass. I had come under the shadow of the East Front and far above me I could hear the vile, hooning whistling of the Room up in the darkness of the unlit wing. Then suddenly, a little in front of me, I heard a man's voice speaking low, but evidently in glee.

"By George! You Chaps, but I wouldn't care to bring a wife home to that!" it said, in the tone of the cultured Irish.

"Someone started to reply, but there came a sharp exclamation and then a rush and I heard footsteps running in all directions. Evidently the men had spotted me.

"For a few seconds I stood there feeling an awful ass. After all, *they* were at the bottom of the haunting! Do you see what a big fool it made me seem? I had no doubt but that they were some of Tassoc's rivals and here I had been feeling in every bone that I had hit a genuine Case! And then, you know, there came the memory of hundreds of details that made me just as much in doubt

again. Anyway, whether it was natural or abnatural, there was a great deal yet to be cleared up.

"I told Tassoc next morning what I had discovered and through the whole of every night for five nights we kept a close watch round the East Wing, but there was never a sign of anyone prowling about and all this time, almost from evening to dawn, that grotesque whistling would hoon incredibly, far above us in the darkness.

On the morning after the fifth night I received a wire from here which brought me home by the next boat. I explained to Tassoc that I was simply bound to come away for a few days, but told him to keep up the watch round the castle. One thing I was very careful to do and that was to make him absolutely promise never to go into the Room between sunset and sunrise. I made it clear to him that we knew nothing definite yet, one way or the other, and if the room were what I had first thought it to be, it might be a lot better for him to die first than enter it after dark.

"When I got here and had finished my business I thought you chaps would be interested and also I wanted to get it all spread out clear in my mind, so I rang you up. I am going over again tomorrow and when I get back I ought to have something

pretty extraordinary to tell you. By the way, there is a curious thing I forgot to tell you. I tried to get a phonographic record of the whistling, but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer.

"Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not magnify the sound — will not even transmit it, seems to take no account of it and acts as if it were nonexistent. I am absolutely and utterly stumped up to the present. I am a wee bit curious to see whether any of you dear clever heads can make daylight of it. *I* cannot — not yet."

He rose to his feet.

"Goodnight, all," he said, and began to usher us out abruptly, but without offence, into the night.

A FORTNIGHT later he dropped us each a card and you can imagine that I was not late this time. When we arrived Carnacki took us straight into dinner and when we had finished and all made ourselves comfortable he began again, where he had left off.

"Now just listen quietly, for I have got something very queer to tell you. I got back late at night and I had to walk up to the castle as I had not warned them that I was coming. It was bright moonlight, so that the

walk was rather a pleasure than otherwise. When I got there the whole place was in darkness and I thought I would go round outside to see whether Tassoc or his brother was keeping watch. But I could not find them anywhere and concluded that they had got tired of it and gone off to bed.

"As I returned across the lawn that lies below the front of the East Wing I caught the hooning whistling of the Room coming down strangely clear through the stillness of the night. It had a peculiar note in it I remember — low and constant, queerly meditative. I looked up at the window, bright in the moonlight, and got a sudden thought to bring a ladder from the stable-yard and try to get a look into the Room from the outside.

"With this notion I hunted round at the back of the castle among the straggle of the office and presently found a long, fairly light ladder, though it was heavy enough for one, goodness knows! I thought at first that I should never get it reared. I managed at last and let the ends rest very quietly against the wall a little below the sill of the larger window. Then, going silently, I went up the ladder. Presently I had my face above the sill and was looking in, alone with the moonlight.

"Of course the queer whistl-

ing sounded louder up there, but it still conveyed that peculiar sense of something whistling quietly to itself — can you understand? Though for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct — a mighty parody of the human, as if I stood there and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man's soul.

"And then, you know, I saw something. The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room was puckered upwards in the center into a strange, soft-looking mound parted at the top into an everchanging hole that pulsated to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound gap across with a queer, inward suction as with the drawing of an enormous breath, then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly, as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight. . . .

"Abruptly they bulged out to a vast pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen and hugely massive and clean-cut in the moonbeams. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper-lip. In the same moment of time the whistling had burst into a mad screaming

note that seemed to stun me, even where I stood, outside of the window. And then the following moment I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room — smooth, polished stone flooring from wall to wall. And there was an absolute silence.

"You can picture me staring into the quiet Room and knowing what I knew. I felt like a sick, frightened child and I wanted to slide *quietly* down the ladder and run away. But in that very instant I heard Tassoc's voice calling to me from within the Room for help, *help*. My God! but I got such an awful dazed feeling and I had a vague, bewildered notion that after all, it was the Irishmen who had got him in there and were taking it out of him. And then the call came again and I burst the window and jumped in to help him. I had a confused idea that the call had come from within the shadow of the great fireplace and I raced across to it, but there was no one there.

" 'TASSOC!' I shouted, and my voice went empty-sounding round the great apartment, and then in a flash *I knew that Tassoc had never called*. I whirled round, sick with fear, towards the window and as I did so a frightful, exultant whistling scream burst through the Room. On my left the end wall had

bellied-in towards me in a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous, to within a yard of my face. I fumbled for a mad instant at my revolver; not for *it*, but myself, for the danger was a thousand times worse than death. And then suddenly the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual was whispered quite audibly in the room. Instantly the thing happened that I have known once before. There came a sense as of dust falling continually and monotonously and I knew that my life hung uncertain and suspended for a flash in a brief, reeling vertigo of unseeable things. Then *that* ended and I knew that I might live. My soul and body blended again and life and power came to me. I dashed furiously at the window and hurled myself out head foremost, for I can tell you that I had stopped being afraid of death. I crashed down on to the ladder and slithered, grabbing and grabbing and so came some way or other alive to bottom. And there I sat in the soft, wet grass with the moonlight all about me and far above through the broken window of the Room, there was a low whistling.

"That is the chief of it. I was not hurt and I went round to the front and knocked Tassoc up. When they let me in we had a long yarn over some good whiskey — for I was shaken to

pieces — and I explained things as much as I could. I told Tassoc that the room would have to come down and every fragment of it be burned in a blast-furnace erected within a pentacle. He nodded. There was nothing to say. Then I went to bed.

"We turned a small army on to the work and within ten days that lovely thing had gone up in smoke and what was left was calcined and clean.

"It was when the workmen were stripping the panelling that I got hold of a sound notion of the beginnings of that beastly development. Over the great fireplace, after the great oak panels had been torn down, I found that there was let into the masonry a scrollwork of stone with on it an old inscription in ancient Celtic, that here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, Jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle.

"When I got the translation clear I gave it to Tassoc. He was tremendously excited for he knew the old tale and took me down to the library to look at an old parchment that gave the story in detail. Afterwards I found that the incident was well-known about the countryside, but always regarded more as a legend, than as history. And no one seemed ever to have dreamt that the old East

wing of Iastrae Castle was the remains of the ancient Seventh Castle.

"From the old parchment I gathered that there had been a pretty dirty job done, away back in the years. It seems that King Alzof and King Ernore had been enemies by birthright, as you might say truly, but that nothing more than a little raiding had occurred on either side for years until Dian Tiansay made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore and sang it before King Alzof, and so greatly was it appreciated that King Alzof gave the jester one of his ladies to wife.

"Presently all the people of the land had come to know the song and so it came at last to King Ernore, who was so angered that he made war upon his old enemy and took and burned him and his castle; but Dian Tiansay, the jester, he brought with him to his own place and having torn his tongue out because of the song which he had made and sung, he imprisoned him in the Room in the East Wing (which was evidently used for unpleasant purposes), and the jester's wife he kept for himself, having a fancy for her prettiness.

"But one night Dian Tiansay's wife was not to be found and in the morning they discovered her lying dead in her husband's arms and he sitting, whistling the Song of Foolishness, for he

had no longer the power to sing it.

"Then they roasted Dian Tiansay in the great fireplace — probably from that self-same 'gallows-iron' which I have already mentioned. And until he died Dian Tiansay 'ceased not to whistle' the Song of Foolishness which he could no longer sing. But afterwards 'in that room' there was often heard at night the sound of something whistling and there 'grew a power in that room' so that none dared to sleep in it. And presently, it would seem, the King went to another castle for the whistling troubled him.

"There you have it all. Of course, that is only a rough rendering of the translation from the parchment. It's a bit quaint! Don't you think so?"

"Yes," I said, answering for the lot. "But how did the thing grow to such a tremendous manifestation?"

"One of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material," replied Carnacki. "The development must have been going forward through centuries, to have produced such a monstrosity. It was a true instance of Saiitii manifestation which I can best explain by likening it to a living spiritual fungus which involves the very structure of the aether-fibre itself and, of course, in so doing acquires an essen-

tial control over the 'material-substance' involved in it. It is impossible to make it plainer in a few words."

"What broke the seventh hair?" asked Taylor.

But Carnacki did not know. He thought it was probably nothing but being too severely tensioned. He also explained that they found out that the men who had run away had not been up to mischief, but had come over secretly merely to hear the whistling which, indeed, had suddenly become the talk of the whole countryside.

"One other thing," said Arkright, "have you any idea what governs the use of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual? I know, of course, that it was used by the Ab-human Priests in the Incantation of the Raaaee, but what used it on your behalf and what made it?"

"You had better read Harzam's Monograph and my Addenda to it, on Astral and 'Astarral' Co-ordination and Interference," said Carnaki. "It is an extraordinary subject and I can only say here that the human-vibration may not be insulated from the 'astarral' (as is always believed to be the case in interferences by the Ab-human), without immediate action being taken by those Forces which govern the spinning of the outer circle. In other words, it is being proved, time after time, that there is some inscrutable

Protective Force constantly intervening between the human-soul (not the body, mind you) and the Outer Monstrosities. Am I clear?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "And you believe that the Room had become the material expression of the ancient Jester — that his soul, rotted with hatred had bred into a monster — eh?" I asked.

"Yes," said Carnacki, nodding. "I think you've put my thought rather neatly. It is a queer coincidence that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended (so I heard since) from the same King Ernore. It makes one think some rather curious thoughts, doesn't it? The marriage coming on and the Room waking to fresh life. If she had gone into that room, ever . . . eh? It had waited a long time. Sins of the fathers. Yes, I've thought of that. They're to be married next week and I am to be best man, which is a thing I hate. And he won his bets, rather! Just think, if ever she had gone into that room. Pretty horrible, eh?"

He nodded his head, grimly, and we four nodded back. Then he rose and took us collectively to the door and presently thrust us forth in friendly fashion on to the Embankment and into the fresh night air.

"Good night," we called back and went to our various homes.

If she had, eh? If she had? That is what I kept thinking.

It Is Written . . .

Letter departments are much older than science fiction, weird fiction, or fantasy magazines, of course, but it was in the old *AMAZING STORIES* where we first became aware of them. The department was called "Discussions", and the literary editor, T. O'Conor Sloane (who later became full editor) nearly always had a comment to make upon each letter that was published. This format was followed in the competing science fiction magazines that Hugo Gernsback published when he lost his original title. But when Harry Bates started running a letter department in *ASTOUNDING STORIES OR SUPER SCIENCE*, he hardly ever made any comments — and then only a few words usually bracketed within the letter. We felt cheated.

When Street & Smith took over *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, F. Orlin Tremaine dispensed even with the occasional comment. He said in reply to a letter we wrote pleading for editorial comment that he did not want to have the last word, did not want to squelch comment. And some fans with whom we discussed the point said that they preferred the non-obtrusive editor.

Thus far, we have acted like the eager reader we were back in the 30's, in handling this department; we have followed our own preferences, commenting on letters which stimulated comment, eschewing it when we felt that none was called for. But now it's time to see how you, the readers, feel about it. Those of you who write in — which do you prefer? If you'd rather that the editor be unobtrusive, say so, won't you? We'll let you have the deciding vote.

"You know," writes Edward

Dong, from Brooklyn Polytechnical Institute, "your magazine is just about the last of its kind. MOH has inherited the mantle of *WEIRD TALES*; it is the last member of a vanishing and lamented generation of magazines — with stories of eldritch horror and lurkers at the threshold. Naturally I have certain tastes that I'd like to see catered to in your magazine. One of these is a taste for Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories. Hardly any more like them, and it's a shame."

So far, the bulk of the requests for Howard stories have centered upon the earlier ones, prior to the emergence of *Conan*. Whether we shall offer any of the *Conan* tales later will depend upon the measure of concensus we can obtain from the readers.

Patti Ewart writes from Abington, Penna., "I would like to thank you for reprinting some classics. As a result I have started re-reading Kipling, Wells, and Hawthorne. I had forgotten how good they were."

This, of course, is a justification for the occasional appearance of an author whose works are, indeed, "generally available". But we do want to place the greatest stress upon the scarce and hard-to-find.

Marvin Katz writes from Williamsport, Pa., "In regard to the question of horror vs. terror as generic terms, I believe Boris Karloff made the definitive analysis of this issue in his introduction to the anthology, *Tales of Terror*, in which he likens 'horror' to the nauseating feeling that one gets from reading about an ax murder, while 'terror' is redolent of the delicious sensation that something is lurking over one's shoulder. One is a fear of a brutal person

but the other is the cleaner, infinitely more effective fear of the unknown. I think it would be a service to reprint this introduction.

"Mr. Karloff suggests that a horror story leaves a queasy sensation in the stomach even after the hair stops standing erect, while a terror tale tingles us more deeply, but with greater dignity. And because grisliness is, after all, a part of life, the supposed escape from horror eventually palls and turns to boredom when we remember how everyday it is. Perhaps we are ashamed at being titillated at such ever-prevalent, ghastly business.

"It should be clear that I decry the term 'horror' in relation to fantasy literature, and prefer to shunt aside those tales which are largely based on such phenomena. It is the only thing I dislike about your otherwise excellent magazine. It is clear that you are an editor of considerable taste and judgment, and I commend you highly for filling a gap in our literary scene since WEIRD TALES became defunct.

"The cover on MOH #6 is a case in point of this problem of horror *vs* terror. I was highly pleased at earlier covers, for one could carry them to work without feeling the least embarrassed. But this gory phantasma makes it necessary to hide the magazine in the drawer, which isn't good advertising for it."

The editor prefers the quiet, dignified sort of cover (which, believe it or not, some readers considered gaudy!) which appeared on our earlier issues, and the publisher was willing to try it out. But the results seem to show that while many people bought and enjoyed the magazine, apparently a large section of our potential audience never noticed it — partly because it did not stand out amidst the clamor on newsstands. The new type of cover is an experiment; we shall see if this approach (not necessarily the specific design

that appeared on our November and January issues, but the more colorful frontispiece in general) helps our growth. Progress was very slow when we tried for dignity, and wholesalers and newsdealers pointed this out to us — that regardless of the worth of our contents, it was advisable to make the packaging more dramatic, even risking a touch of the melodramatic.

This question of quiet as opposed to colorful covers has been one which readers of weird, fantastic, and science fiction magazines have been arguing with editors (and, more often, publishers who set policies, the editor having little to say) for at least 35 years. We can only note that, in earlier years, the dignified type of cover rarely "sold" the magazine which tried it, and the experience of our first five issues seem to indicate that times have not changed in this respect; for every reader gained with the quiet type of cover, which one could carry without the least embarrassment, perhaps ten or more potential buyers are lost. And we know that we, ourselves, might never have noticed AMAZING STORIES in its early years had it featured dignified covers.

Adding to the attempt to distinguish between terror and horror, Michael Denning writes from Chicago: "In an article called 'Dagger of the Mind', James Sandoe offers a definition of horror *vs* terror that is not too far from the one you suggested. He says . . . Terror is intense fear or dread and horror is the same fear or dread mingled with repugnance or loathing." He finds that of the two emotions, horror is more complicated and more overwhelming and perhaps, for that very reason, it cannot be sustained as long. You can go around in terror day after day; horror can come back now and then, but after a while it sort of acts like an anesthetic. One other inter-

esting thing he points out about horror is that it has a far wider range than terror — you can feel horror where there is no terror at all, because there is no immediate sense that this might happen to you, thus no fear, no terror. So, he says, 'The horror story ranges more freely because horror imposes no structure but rather an emotion, a feeling. And there is no retreat, however sheltered, to which horror may not penetrate. We find it in the newspapers, called tragedy.' And he cites the example of the child mutilated by a madman. Whether or not you have a child of your own, this can rouse a feeling of horror; but it takes the specific of a known or suspected 'fiend' in the neighborhood to make this spill over into terror. The horror won't last too long, but the terror can go on until you're convinced

that the danger has been removed.

"So it seems to me that while a terror tale can maintain itself from beginning to end, because fear can keep on going, the horror story can only have its spots here and there. It's harder to do than the terror tale, and as you said, the two elements can be combined in the same story. . . . I'm glad, by the way, that you make no effort to make every story in each issue, or even many stories in each issue, real horror stories. People who wonder why you call the magazine as you do should pay more attention to the sub-headings. We know we'll find *some* horror in each issue, and the chances are that it will be powerful but we can't be sure where or when. This makes for good suspense. It also makes for a range of good stories of the strange, unusual and bizarre, too."

THE RECKONING

The exclamations of delight drowned the cries of anguish over the cover design by Fred Wolters that appeared on our November and January issues; but some who disapproved did so because of their feeling that a color cover should symbolize a story in the issue, if not directly illustrate it, rather than express the general feeling of the magazine. As this is being typed, we are eagerly waiting your comments on the April cover.

The Lovecraft-Derleth novelet in our January issue was not the most controversial item on our contents page. More than 50% of the voters rated it either outstanding or in first place (the difference being that an "O" rating is scored as zero, the next best-liked story on this ballot is scored as "1" — a perfect score for a story would be "O") and it received a minimum of "X" ratings (which are scored with a penalty point added; a story in last place in the January issue received an "8" score when all items were listed — but every story marked "X" was scored as "9"). In the present issue, since there are 10 stories, every "X" will count 11 points.

Here is how the January issue came out. (1) *The Shuttered Room* by H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth; (2) *The Phantom Farmhouse* by Seabury Quinn; (3) *The Thing From — Outside* by George Allan England; (4) *Black Thing At Midnight* by Joseph Payne Brennan; (5) *The Shadows on the Wall* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman. The most controversial story in this issue was *A Way With Kids* by Ed M. Clinton.

Daniel F. Cole, of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, seems to speak for the majority response to our new style cover, as he writes, "I was immensely pleased with the November MAGAZINE OF HORROR. You finally got a cover! I only wish it were a Virgil Finlay or a Boris Dolgov, but I guess I can't be choosy and should be satisfied with the magazine as it is."

Well, no reader *should* be satisfied if he really isn't! Speaking your mind means that there is a chance of seeing a change in the direction you desire. If large numbers of readers ask for the same thing, and circulation increases indicate that the readers writing in are reasonably representative, then we can feel that following these requests may be of value. This is particularly meaningful when more, or more readers from whom we have not heard before, join the chorus, and when they ask for (or approve) the same sort of thing that the "tried and true" reader has been asking for.

"No matter what your other readers say," writes George H. Wells of Riverhead, N. Y., "I like your large print, your one stapled signature binding, and your reprinting of old stories (especially the hard-to-get kind). I fit in with your other small town readers; things out here are very hard to get unless published by a big national paperback company, and hardcovers are *out* because of cost.

"Publish science fiction, by all means. I'd rather have variety than poor quality, and I don't like people who draw the line too strictly. Anything unusual will be fine."

E. Person, notes on the back of a preference page, "Would like to see a Reader's Exchange of Ideas section."

Well, the fact is — we have one if the readers want to use it. That

is one of the various functions that this letter department can serve; we are entirely in favor, but it's up to you, the readers, as to whether you want to take advantage of the opportunity.

"What is so great about these well-known authors, Wells and Lovecraft?" writes D. S. Kesterton, also on a preference page. "I have as yet to see a good story by Wells.

"As for Lovecraft's reputation (which I find oozing throughout most of the comments in MOH), it was certainly not shown in that long, drawnout piece entitled, *The Dreams in the Witch-House*. Either prove he is a good writer, or use the space for better authors.

"Perhaps he was a good writer in those days, but as time advances, so does the caliber of writing."

I can't momentarily, Reader Kesterton, think of a more fatuous waste of time than to try to tell you why you should have enjoyed a story you did not enjoy. Perhaps you may find one of HPL's shorter tales more to your taste, perhaps not. Every one of us finds *some* great — or reputably great — writers unreadable, whether in the field of highly imaginative fiction, or in what is considered the mainstream of great literature from the earliest times. To give a personal example, the editor has never been able to see what is supposedly great about *Wuthering Heights*, yet this has been widely touted as a masterpiece of literature, as well as being a masterly evocation of the eerie. To me it is just dull. I found the cinema version a crashing bore, Lawrence Olivier and Merle Oberon (two film stars who can usually make any material sparkle) notwithstanding. And turning to the original, I found it of even less interest than the dull, drawnout movie. Well, perhaps we're both wrong — but I doubt if

you could *prove* it to me any more than I could prove it to you.

Rating *The Door To Saturn* as best in the November issue, Rachel Cosgrove Payes puts an asterisk beside it, footnoting, "Not science fiction? Oh, pooh — 'tis too!"

Well, she says it is, and she's a science fiction author. I say it isn't, and I'm a science fiction author, too. Let us let the readers fight it out

while we sit back and count the corpses.

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find "The Reckoning", reporting on your ratings of the contents of our January issue. Meanwhile, readers, thank you for the increasing number of letters and preference pages, and please let us know your likes and dislikes on this issue. RAWL

INTRODUCTION (*Continued From Page 4*)

addendas to your lists. Let us repeat: do not hesitate to list a story because you think that someone else has already suggested it; there will be times when the number of votes for a particular story can be of considerable value to us. This also applies to requests for authors in general, without any mention of specific stories; but specific nominations are the most needed.

The three most asked-for authors are H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard. As of late November 1964, 38 stories by Lovecraft have been nominated, while there are 17 each for Smith and Howard — and with Howard, the majority of requests indicate material published prior to or outside of the well-known *Conan* series. There is also a small but very articulate minority which want none of these authors. As a reader, still very fond of all three, it would be easy to decide to start featuring all three in each issue; as an editor, we find it obvious that this would be an error. We shall offer you some of each, but not constantly, and look to duplications on our list (which at present fills 11 pages) for the order in which nominations will be presented.

Other elements to be considered when we select material for reprint are length, general availability, availability to us under current circumstances, balance in a particular issue, and over-all balance.

Many fine stories requested must be put aside — momentarily, at least — because of length. Several of you have asked for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, arguing that while this story is quite available in libraries, etc., and the theme is familiar, relatively few may actually have read it. The original story, these readers

urge, has an impact which cannot be translated into another medium. There have been three motion picture versions: a silent starring John Barrymore, and two sound versions, starring Frederick March and Spencer Tracy. All three had their excellences but none had the air of mystery and suspense that Stevenson's story holds (even when you know what it's all about), and none realized the fundamental description of Mr. Hyde — who did not look like a monster, but rather about whom there seemed to hover a "haunting air of deformity", "Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish; he gave an impression of deformity without any namable malformation, he had a displeasing smile . . ." Mr. Utterson, the lawyer, says, "God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? . . . or is it the radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures its clay continent? . . ." Barrymore presented something of this, but even so was too graphic; March was so grisly looking as to leave no mystery of why one should feel a strange repulsion at the sight of Hyde; Tracy's transformation was the most subtle, and came closest to the sort of horror the author is driving at — the main difficulty here was that, even so, the resemblance to Dr. Jekyll was too close. We have just recently re-read the story, and the requests for reprinting it are, indeed, tempting.

But it is too long to run in one issue; it would take up half the magazine. To run it in two sections is possible, but, although your editor loves serial stories, and we know that many readers will tolerate them, two months is too long to ask you to wait between installments.

But the final argument against reprinting the Stevenson classic (and a true classic it is) is that you can obtain it in a handsome soft-cover edition from Airmont Publishing Company, 22 East 60th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022, @ 50c the copy. It may be available at your local newsdealers; if not, you should add 5c for postage when ordering from the publisher. And you will also find it in Damon Knight's anthology, **A Century of Great Short Science Fiction Novels**, Delacorte Press, New York; 379pp; \$4.95.

Some of the Lovecraft short stories are still out of print; these we will consider for reprint for a while. By the end of 1965, however, all should be back in print through Arkham House; and since the entire contents of their earlier collection, **The Dunwich Horror and Others** has been reprinted in two volumes by Lancer Books, New York (the first bearing the origi-

Coming Next Issue

As Doctor Farnham had pointed out, the barbed wire would not deter the things through the pain or injuries caused by its jagged points, and hence the fence was erected for strength and height, and formed a barrier which even elephants could scarcely have broken through. This, however, took time, and long before it was completed innumerable attempts had been made to surround and capture or to destroy the soulless beings, for so fixed are certain ideas in the human brain that the officials could not believe that the Living Dead could not be killed, despite the arguments of Doctor Farnham who, over and over again, declared that it was a waste of money and life to attempt to annihilate the beings he had resurrected.

Bullets had no effect upon them, and when, after many arguments and innumerable protests, it was decided that, as the beings were no better than wild beasts, and therefore, a menace to the world, any means were justifiable, preparations were made to burn them out. Innumerable fires were kindled, and before a fresh wind the flames swept across the entire area occupied by the Living Dead and reduced the last vestiges of their former village to ashes. But when, the fire over, a detachment of police was sent into the district to count the bodies, they were attacked, almost annihilated and driven back by the horde of singed, mutilated, ghastly beings who had survived the conflagration as completely as they had survived powder and ball, poison gases, and every other means to destroy them.

Next, it was suggested that they be drowned, and although Doctor Farnham openly scoffed at the idea and the expense involved, no one could be made to believe that the things were really immune to death in any form. Hence, at a terrific expense, a dam was built across the river flowing through the district and for days the entire area was flooded. But at the end of the time the Living Dead were as lively, as savage, as unreasoning and as great a plague as before. . . . On two occasions the beings had literally torn themselves free . . .

*You will not want to miss this powerful novelet
by a master of imaginative fiction.*

THE PLAGUE OF THE LIVING DEAD

by A. Hyatt Verrill

nal title, the second titled **The Colour out of Space and Others**) @ 50c per copy, it may be that just about all of Lovecraft will be generally available in a year or so, including **Supernatural Horror in Literature**.

Some stories asked for just do not belong in MOH. **The Suicide Club**, by Stevenson (a series of three short stories) is strange adventure, but not strange in the sense we mean; the stories would make fine classic reprints for a mystery magazine but lack the impact for horror, terror, or the truly bizarre, frightening, strange, etc.

We have used some stories which we did not realize were generally available at the time, because we had not seen the pocket-book collections which contained them prior to our own use of them. We are happy to see new collections appear, but cannot suppress a shudder each time a further one turns up, wondering if it contains a story we have just published, or have so deeply in the works that we cannot withdraw it. But we can tell you that some requested stories such as **Lukundoo**, by Edward Lucas White, **Oh, Whistle and I'll Come To You, Lad**, by M. R. James, **The Voice in the Night**, by William Hope Hodgson, and **How Love Came to Professor Guildea**, by Robert Huchins, are in still-available Alfred Hitchcock softcover collections.

For a variety of reasons, we are not presently able to obtain rights to some fine stories you have requested; should this situation change, we'll try to get them for you, providing we have not observed them in softcover collections between times.

And, finally, we have to consider not only the balance of the issue we're working on now, but our over-all balance. Some of you have pointed out to us various themes, authors, and types of stories which we have not presented as yet. We are even more painfully aware of most of these omissions, and want to rectify as many of them as possible before repeating some authors, or some story types, etc. When we do repeat an author, we want to do so with a theme or story-type we have not presented before.

Type, alas, isn't rubber. There's one story we've been wanting to get in for over a year, but so far, once we achieved as much balance as we could, there hasn't been room. So if you feel frustrated at not seeing a worthy favorite you've asked for, remember that you're not alone; we are frustrated nearly every issue ourselves, as we hardly ever manage to get everything in that we hoped to include in the current issue. RAWL

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

I'd like to see these stories or authors:

Mail this coupon to MAGAZINE OF HORROR, c/o Health Knowledge,
Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003
(or better still, write us a letter!)

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place, mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "1".)

THE NIGHT WIRE**SACRILEGE****ALL THE STAIN OF LONG DELIGHT****SKULLS IN THE STARS****THE PHOTOGRAPHS****THE DISTORTION OUT OF SPACE****GUARANTEE PERIOD****THE DOOR IN THE WALL****THE THREE LOW MASSES****THE WHISTLING ROOM****Comment:**

Subscription and Back Issue Page

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Aug. 1963: The Man With A Thousand Legs by Frank Belknap Long; The Yellow Sign by Robert W. Chambers; The Unbeliever by Robert Silverberg; The Last Dawn by Frank Lillie Pollack; Babylon: 70 M. by Donald A. Wollheim; The Maze and the Monster by Edward D. Hoch.

Nov. 1963: Clarissa by Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Space-Eaters by Frank Belknap Long; The Charmer by Archie Binns; The Faceless Thing by Edward D. Hoch; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes by Rudyard Kipling; The Electric Chair by George Waight.

Feb. 1964: The Seeds of Death by David H. Keller; The Repairer of Reputations by Robert W. Chambers; The Place of the Pythons by Arthur J. Burks; The Seeking Thing by Janet Hirsch; They That Wait by H. S. W. Chibbett; Jean Bouchon by S. Baring-Gould; Luela Miller by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

May 1964: The Dreams in the Witch-House by H. P. Lovecraft; The Mark of the Beast by Rudyard Kipling; What Was It? by Fitz-James O'Brien; Beyond the Breakers by Anna Hunger; A Dream of Falling by Attila Hatvany; The Truth About Pyecraft by H. G. Wells; Last Act: October by Tigrina.

Sept. 1964: Cassius by Henry S. Whitehead; The Ghostly Rental by Henry James; The House of the Worm by Merle Prout; Five-Year Contract by J. Vernon Shea; The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing by Walt Liebscher; Bones by Donald A. Wollheim.

Nov. 1964: Caverns of Horror by Laurence Manning; The Mask by Robert W. Chambers; The Pacer by August Derleth; The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde by Robert Barbour Johnson; The Door to Saturn by Clark Ashton Smith; The Moth by H. G. Wells.

Jan. 1965: The Shuttered Room by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth; The Phantom Farmhouse by Seabury Quinn; The Thing From — Outside by George Allan England; Black Thing at Midnight by Joseph Payne Brennan; The Shadows on the Wall by Mary Wilkins-Freeman; The Oblong Box by Edgar Allan Poe.

Apr. 1965: The Dead Who Walk by Ray Cummings; The Hand of Glory by R. H. D. Barham; The Black Laugh by William J. Makin; Orpheus's Brother by John Brunner; The Burglar-Proof Vault by Oliver Taylor; Jack by Reynold Junker.

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